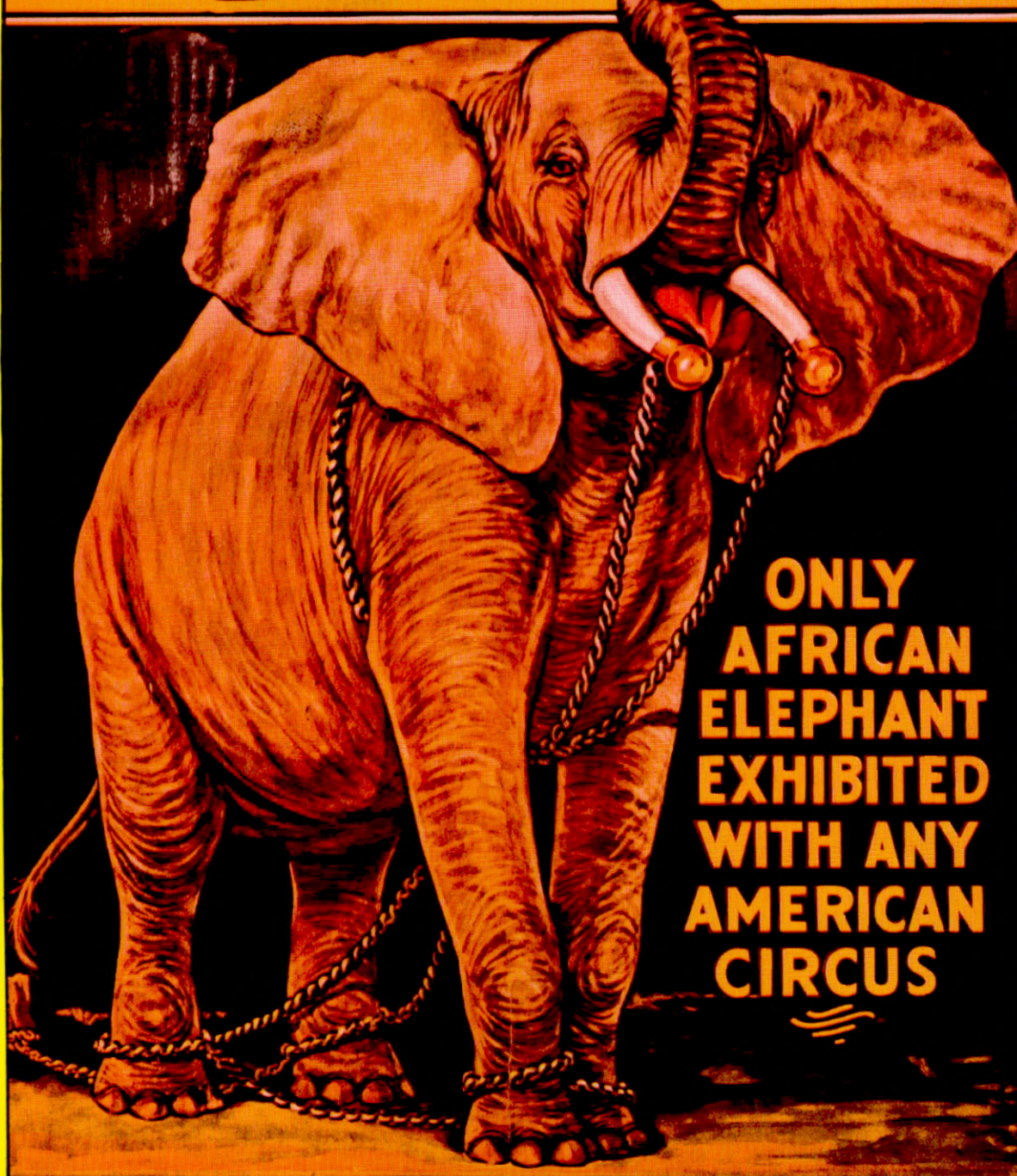


# THE RAINBOW WAGON

MARCH-APRIL 1973

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## THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Vol. 17, No. 2

March-April 1973

**Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Editor**

**Joseph T. Bradbury, Fred D. Pfening, III Associate Editors**

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### THIS MONTH'S COVER

It was 38 years ago this spring that the wonderful new Cole Bros. Clyde Beatty Circus opened in Chicago, Illinois.

The Cole show is perhaps the best known circus, other than Ringling-Barnum, to present historians. Floyd King, the General Agent of the new show, directed the Erie Litho Co. to design and print a number of posters to advertise the show.

The window card reproduced on our cover this issue is one of the special designs Erie made for the show during its first season of 1935.

### Mail Delays

The last two issues of the Bandwagon have been late in publication and in mailing.

As you all know, the Editor serves in a

non-paid position, and the time required for all Bandwagon activities, editing, back issues and address changes, has to be worked in at off hours. We trust that all of our readers understand when delays do occur.

In addition there are certain areas of the country that seem to require an extensive delivery time. So please stand by on each issue and don't get excited too early.

### Dues & Subscription Notices in Mail

Julian Jimenez, CHS Secretary-Treasurer, has placed the 1973 dues and subscription invoices in the mail. These are for the fiscal year ending in 1974.

The \$8 cost is due May 1, 1973. If we do not have your payment by July 1, 1973, your name will be dropped from the Bandwagon mailing list.

Please forward your payment in the return self-addressed envelope provided, as soon as possible. We don't want any of you to miss a single issue of the Bandwagon.

### 1973 CHS Convention August 3 & 4

The annual meeting of the Circus Historical Society, Inc., will be held in Baraboo, Wisconsin, on August 3 and 4, 1973.

The Circus World Museum Library and Research Center will again be the location of the meeting. Because of the success of last year's format the program will consist of the presentation of papers on circus history. President Chang Reynolds and Vice President Stuart Thayer met recently in California and formulated plans for the program.

Reynolds and Thayer are co-chairmen of the event and are anxious to hear from members who wish to present a paper at this year's meeting. The papers presented will be published at a later date in the Bandwagon.

Set aside August 3 and 4 for the CHS annual meeting and historic circus form.

### RAILROAD CIRCUSES 1871-1956

Do you know what years Sparks or Christy Bros. or Sun Bros. or Gollmar Bros. were on Rails? I have a chart called "RAILROAD CIRCUSES 1871-1956" available. It is printed black & white and is 12 x 17 in size suitable to frame. Mailed in a tube. Postpaid \$1.50

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# A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE HISTORY OF MADISON SQUARE GARDEN AND THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE RINGLINGS IN THE HISTORY AND AIR CONDITIONING OF THE GARDEN.

## PART ONE

Air-conditioning and the American circus teamed up a long time ago — to be exact, in the early 1920's. The link between the two enterprises is a direct one.

It is a story, the facts of which are not inscribed in any one book or journal or newspaper article or in any one library or historical society. The story would not be related now if it had not been for the foresight, interest, cooperation and appreciation for the value and necessity of preserving the events of the past on the part of certain persons at the Carrier Corporation, Buffalo Forge Company, Chrysler Corporation (Airtemp Division), and Ringling-Barnum Combined Shows, Inc.

An appropriate time and place to begin is on:

A lovely star-lite evening, June 16th. The year 1890. The softly tinted interior of a spacious auditorium. A vast audience of formally-clad women and men, many of whose names have been written indelibly upon the scrolls of American achievement. In the center of the brilliant gathering, upon a circular stage, a famous orchestra. Before them a slender, absorbed gentleman of foreign aspect. He raised his baton, the first strains of the bewitching *Blue Danube Waltz* subdued the gentle murmur of the great assemblage. Then spontaneously, the thunder of applause rolled over the dwarfed figure of the conductor and engulfed him and his orchestra in sound. The exquisite tones of his orchestra were lost. The baton signaled 'cease'. Herr Eduard Strauss of Vienna, turned and bowed before the first audience in Madison Square Garden, the largest and most magnificent structure of its kind in America. The tumult subsided. The orchestra began anew. The haunting lilting rhythm of the music cast a spell upon those listening thousands. They abandoned themselves to the exquisite melody, the intoxicating tempo of the waltz. The picturesque conductor swayed and moved with the music, his own orchestra. Somewhere in the great hall sat Stanford White, the designer of the great palace of play. Even before this crowning achievement, this young man, in his middle thirties, had been recognized as a great architect.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. White was associated with the firm

By Dr. Robert James Loeffler

of McKim, Mead and White. His name will always be associated with the Garden because he kept a studio in the tower, under the famous bronze figure of Diana, and especially because it was on its roof garden that he was shot.

A fitting tribute was paid to Stanford White:

... and for that matter every citizen with a decent share of public spirit, has reason to be glad that it was put into the hearts of some men to build a great building for public entertainments of a 'monster' or spectacular kind; and particularly that it was put into their hearts to choose Stanford White to be the architect of the edifice with which his name became so closely and so tragically connected, since it was destined to be the place of his own death by murder that he was so enthusiastically rearing.<sup>2</sup>

**Franconi's Hippodrome was located near the Madison Avenue and Fourth Avenue location that was to be the original Madison Square Garden. This drawing of the Franconi building shows the size of the structure. The Franconi Hippodrome lasted until 1854 and was one of the first really large buildings to house a circus. Pfening Collection.**

But let us return to even earlier days. Ages ago Madison Square (Fourth Avenue and Madison Avenue between Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets) still recalled the name of Tieman's Farm; a House of Refuge for small sinful boys stood in its center; and on the corner now held (1894) by the Fifth Avenue Hotel stood Corporal Thompson's Madison Cottage, where, at the Sign of the Buck-horn, foretold by a huge pair of antlers, the trotting men of the period found refreshment. Not far away was the famous Franconi's Hippodrome which lasted until 1854 and boys not sinful enough to be incarcerated played ball where the Worth Monument was erected in 1857. The Fifth Avenue brown stone church was built on the eastern side of Madison Square in 1854 and the Fifth Avenue Hotel in 1859. Delmonico's was on the north corner.

In the early 1850's the New York and Harlem Railroad and the New York and Hudson Railroad were distinct entities, one a formidable rival of the other. In 1853 the New York and Harlem Railroad bought the aforementioned property and at the Fourth Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street location they built a starting office for the city car line. In 1854 the railroad company erected a building as a reception station for





milk trains and the delivery point for milk and other farm produce that arrived in the city during the night and early morning hours. In 1863 a passenger station was built. In those days one had to go to 26th Street and Fourth Avenue to get on the Harlem train. The railroad station:

... was not a solid and impressive structure ... but ... a mere low, sordid shed. It was called the Harlem Railroad Station, and it played the same double role that Grand Central Station does today; from one side the cars started for Albany, and from the other side, Boston. The horses, not the trains, were the motive power at first as far as Forty-second Street, where the engines were attached in the unprotected shed.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, "for years the city was treated to the amusing spectacle of passenger trains dragged down Fourth Avenue by horses because it was not deemed safe to use steam power in the heart of the city."<sup>4</sup>

The sole passenger station of the Hudson River Railroad was at Tenth Avenue and 30th Street, and its freight station was at Chambers Street, facing City Hall Square.

The Fourth Avenue station of the New York and Harlem Railroad served New Yorkers from 1863 to 1871 when Grand Central Station was constructed on 42nd Street facing down 4th Avenue. Cornelius Vanderbilt became interested in railroading in 1862. He eyed the New York and Harlem Railroad and in 1867 he gained control of it for a mere \$9.00 per share and converted the road from a rival of the Hudson River Railroad into a humble auxiliary to it, discontinuing the through trains and their competition. Between December 10, 1867, and January 1868 he obtained control of the New York and Hudson Railroad (Daniel Drew, owner) for a mere \$25.00 per share. Vanderbilt next joined the roads

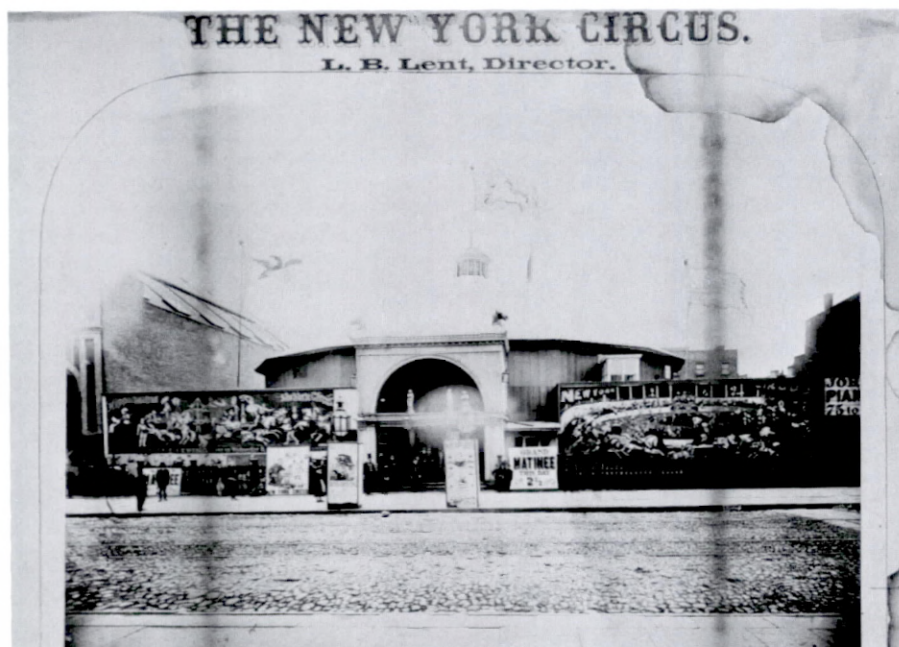
into the New York Central (Erastus Corning was in control of this road) and the Hudson River Railroad. Vanderbilt thus had clear 'sailing' into New York City and into Albany and the route to the west and Chicago. The *Architectural Record* reports that:

Presently the popular murmurs against the killing of foot-passengers on the cross streets above 42nd Street by the trains became formidable. With the building up and population of the region, the occasional homicides became something like a chronic massacre, and the expense to the road of these accidents incidental to its operation a matter a serious consideration. Whereupon, by arrangement with the City, the Fourth Avenue improvement was made which afforded grade crossings from 42nd Street to the Harlem River. The next step was the construction of Grand Central Station.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, in 1870 when Vanderbilt was 76 years old he ordered that a new and grand depot be erected in Manhattan as well as a gargantuan freight house. For the freight house, down came the trees in St. John's Park because Vanderbilt persuaded Trinity Church to sell the land to him for a "cool" one million dollars. Construction on Grand Central Station, as it is called, began in 1870 and was completed in 1871. Then, the 1863 passenger station was abandoned and later leased to W. C. Coup.

The Tenth Avenue station of the Hudson River Railroad sank to the position of a station for suburban and interurban rail traf-

**The Hippodrome building is shown in this photo when it housed the L. B. Lent New York Circus. It was located opposite the Academy of Music on Fourteenth Street. Pfening Collection.**



fic, and the Fourth Avenue station (Harlem R.R.), completely deprived of its function, came into the market as unimproved real estate. The old station area became the largest enclosure in Manhattan. The area extended from Third Avenue to Lexington and from street to street in the Sixties, and from Fourth to Madison and from street to street in the Twenties. The area was destined to become Madison Square Garden. It was simply a deserted trainshed.

The abandoned Harlem Railroad Station almost immediately upon its abandonment was found to have a public use. It had never had any other pretension than that of sheltering cars in and out of service, and lacked conveniences for anymore complicated and specialized occupancy. As to its architecture, it was as innocent of the pretense of that as of the reality. Nevertheless, it was made available for several descriptions of 'big show', which could not be held elsewhere, and which could here be at least given, if not properly 'accommodated'. Athletic contests, horse shows, monster concerts were the popular entertainment to which the old station was used.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the abandoned railroad shed of the old New York and Harlem Railroad provided adequate space for the erection of circus tents in rapidly expanding New York City. As will be seen, both L. B. Lent and P. T. Barnum made early use of this railroad site.

P. T. Barnum's Great Traveling Exposition and World's Fair exhibited at the New York Hippodrome (also called the Hippodrome by old timers in the 1870's) between November 18 (night) and December 23, 1872. In respect to the Hippodrome, it is interesting to note that it was erected on the former site of Nixon's Alhambra. The latter was a pavilion erected by James M. Nixon in August, 1863 on the south side of Fourteenth Street, between Third and Fourth Avenues, directly opposite the Academy of Music. Nixon coined it the Alhambra. The establishment was set off into a pit and dress circle and admission charges were twenty-five and fifty cents. It was purely a temporary structure, with board sides and a canvas top. Mme. Macarte, the English equestrienne, made her American debut here on October 12, 1863. The Alhambra closed on October 17th because its patrons were not protected from the cold nights of winter.

The Hippodrome was built on the same site and was opened on February 8, 1864. It was heated by steam heat. Brown tells us that:

The building was constructed of corrugated and ridged iron, and was fire-proof. It was built after the model of the Champs Elysees, Paris. The main building was one hundred and ten feet in diameter, and the dome rose to the height of seventy-five feet, surmounted by a cupola. The iron roof was affixed to heavy timber posts. The main sup-



ports of the dome were a series of columns surmounted by richly ornamented caps. These columns were also cased with corrugated iron. There were three distinct places for the auditors—the orchestra seats, dress circle, and the pit, with a wide promenade in the rear, around the entire circle of seats. The orchestra seats were composed of arm sofas, for which seventy-five cents was charged. There were six hundred of these. In the rear was the dress circle, in which there was seating capacity for five hundred persons. The pit could accommodate, comfortable seated, six hundred people. In addition to this, there was standing room in the promenade and other parts of the house capable of accommodating six hundred men, making standing room for fourteen hundred persons, and when crowded, two thousand could be packed away. The ring was the largest (with the exception of traveling shows) ever used in the United States, being forty-three feet six inches, which is one foot six inches larger than Astley's in London, and six inches bigger than the Cirque Napoleon at Paris. There were two ring entrances exactly opposite one another; this item alone was a great improvement, both for spectacular pieces and for battoute leaping. There were two entrances to the building, the chief one being a beautiful portico in the shape of an Italian arch twenty-three feet high and twenty-two feet in width; within was an interior vestibule twelve feet in depth, with wreathed columns and four niches, in which statues were placed. Over this entrance was the band, which was the dividing line between the twenty-five and fifty centres.<sup>7</sup>

Spalding & Rogers Circus Company which had recently returned from a two year cruise to the seacoast cities of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and the West Indies took possession on April 25, 1864. They had the roof replaced with a more substantial one; they remained until May 21st. On October 3, 1864, James M. Nixon became the manager and he closed on June 10, 1865. Then on September 25, 1865, Lewis B. Lent was the manager and Nat Austin, the director of amusements. Dick Platt was the owner and he sold it to Mr. Lent who promptly changed its name to "Lent's New York Circus", on November 6, 1865. In the summer of 1866 the following improvements were made on the building:

The earth had been excavated, the ring and surrounding seats lowered, and a hanging gallery added, thereby materially increasing the seating capacity of the auditorium. Underneath the raised seats the dens of animals and museum curiosities were placed. The front entrance was materially improved by alterations, and a large false front, entirely concealing the iron building from view, was erected. and

covered with large oil paintings, characteristic of the entertainments within, and the season terminated May 4, 1867.<sup>8</sup>

1871, after Barnum had opposed W. C. Coup in the latter's insistence that the Barnum show be put on rails in 1872, Barnum began to interfere more and more with manager Coup's handling of the circus. Barnum decided, at the close of the season of 1872, to lease the name "Barnum" to partially finance and equip a circus for P. A. Older (Older & Chandler Circus). The circus was to tour the south during the summer of 1873. The venture was unsuccessful as Coup had suspected, and he refused to give aid to the impending crisis. Older and Chandler became stranded at Shreveport, Louisiana, during the 1873 epidemic of yel-

**NEW-YORK CIRCUS**  
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EVERY NIGHT AT 8.  
And on  
WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY MATINEE AT 2½  
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yet offered at this establishment; introducing the  
THREE GREATEST EQUESTRIAN ARTISTS THAT  
HAVE EVER APPEARED IN AMERICA,  
VIZ:  
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EVERY NIGHT AT 8,  
And on  
WEDNESDAY AND SATURDAY AT 2½.  
Supported by  
AN IMMENSITY OF TALENT.

The abandoned Harlem Railroad Station was used by Barnum and L. B. Lent. Later a large pavilion was erected nearby and was called Nixon's Alhambra. It was on the Nixon site that the New York Hippotheatron was built. This newspaper ad for the L. B. Lent New York Circus appearing at the Hippotheatron, was in the January 20, 1866 issue of the New York Tribune. Original in Pfening Collection.

low fever, and Sturtevant says Coup was left in New York to busy himself with remodeling and preparing the Hippotheatron which had been purchased by Barnum and his associates.<sup>9</sup> T. Allston Brown indicates the property had been purchased from Mr. L. B. Lent. The New York Times states that:

P. T. Barnum has purchased Lent's Circus, including the buildings in Fourteenth Street and will enlarge and improve the concern and open his great menagerie, museum and circus early in

November. Mr. Barnum has arranged with Mr. Geo. Wood for permission to exhibit in this city.<sup>10</sup>

On November 18, 1872, Barnum's Museum, Menagerie, Hippodrome and Circus opened but the engagement was cut short because as *Harper's Weekly* informs its readers in bold type:

#### THE HIPPODROME BURNED

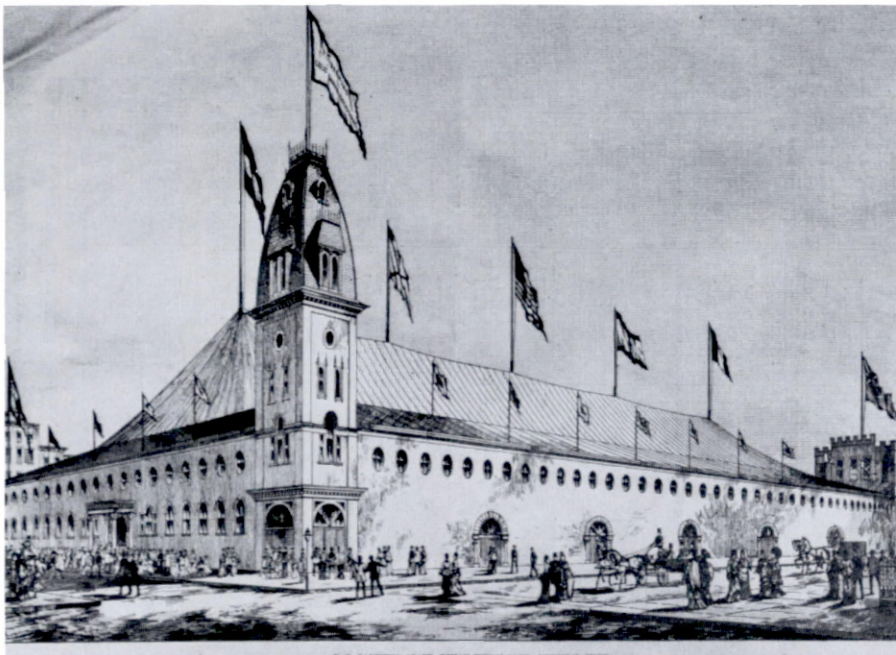
At a few minutes before four o'clock on Tuesday morning, December 24, a fire broke out in the engine-room of Barnum's Hippodrome, Museum, and Menagerie, on Fourteenth Street. This building, like the Brooklyn Tabernacle, was a frame-work of wood covered with corrugated iron. The alarm was immediately given, but it was next to useless to call the firemen, as far as saving anything about this shell of a building was concerned. It burned like a bonfire. The heat was intense, and the flames communicated to Grace Chapel, next adjoining on the east, and this elegant edifice was soon consumed. The iron-front building adjoining the circus on the west, and a large brick building next to the church, were also burned... No thing was saved of the contents of BARNUM'S establishment except two elephants. The lions and tigers, bears and sea-lions, and rare birds and costly automatic figures, were all destroyed.<sup>11</sup>

Again Allston Brown provides a more vivid picture of the disaster:

The walls of the building, which were of thin corrugated iron, became quickly heated by the fierce flames at their base, and helped not only to spread flames, but engendered so great a heat that the firemen could not enter the building. The animals in their cages began to show signs of fear, and their excitement increased with the noise and heat of the fire. They dashed with terrific force against the sides of their cages, vainly endeavoring to regain their liberty. There were three elephants in the building, confined by chains fastened to the floor. As the fire grew hotter the bears, lions, and leopards were seen with their paws endeavoring to wrench the iron bars of their cages asunder, and, as the flames or heat prevented their keepers from rescuing them, they were abandoned to their fate. None of the keepers had the keys of any of the cages, otherwise some of the animals could have been saved. All the performers lost their wardrobes, and all the dresses which had been made for "Bluebird" were likewise consumed. A number of valuable trained dogs belonging to Charles White were also burned.<sup>12</sup>

It now appears that Barnum circus officials (W. C. Coup, Dan Costello, S. Hurd, and P. T. Barnum) leased the New York and Harlem Railroad Company property





at Fourth and Twenty-sixth Street in the fall of 1873, together with permission to remove the buildings thereon. The circus erected an amphitheater of wood at this time. The *New York Herald* for October 12, 1873 reports:

P. T. Barnum's Great Show, Will Open in New York, Fourth Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street, For a Few Days Only. Commencing Monday night, October 20.

Three times larger than ever. In order to make room for the vast combination of exhibitions, several brick buildings have been removed and the whole block between Fourth and Madison Avenues has been occupied, upon part of which a large Wooden Amphitheatre, capable of seating 3,000 people extra, with choice reserved seats, in process of erection and will be ready for the grand opening, Monday Night, October 20. This immense wooden superstructure built somewhat after the manner of the Ancient Roman Amphitheatre, will give a joint seating capacity of 16,000 people. It is the only vacant grounds in New York City large enough for Barnum's World's Fair.

The Amphitheater was not completely weatherproof because it was first simply covered with a canvas top and we read:

A violent rainstorm which shed an unexpected dampness over the scene, and necessitated the prompt and general use of umbrellas. Both audience and performers, however, maintained their good nature under the circumstances, and the entertainment apart from its aquatic accompaniments, seemed to give entire satisfaction.<sup>13</sup>

L. B. Lent's *New York Circus, Caravan*

**P. T. Barnum opened his Hippodrome at Madison and Fourth Avenues on April 27, 1874. The outside of the building is shown in this drawing. Courtesy of the New York Historical Society, NYC.**

and Zoological Garden used the same site on the previous March 21, 1873, the site of the old Harlem Railway Buildings, on the square lying between Madison and Fourth Avenues at 26th and 27th Streets, the buildings having been deserted by the railroad when it opened Grand Central Station at 42nd Street in 1871. This event provides additional evidence that the railroad company leased its property to various circus companies.

In the spring of 1873, because of the previously mentioned Hippotheatron fire, Barnum's Great Traveling Exposition and World's Fair played the American Institute Rink at 63rd and 3rd Streets, New York, between March 29 (afternoon) and April 19, 1873. There is little question but that Lent beat Barnum to the railroad site in the spring of 1873.

The writer has in his possession a certified copy of the search made by the Register of the City of New York which substantiates the claim that the owners of the old New York and Harlem Railroad Company did rent the land to various persons after the station was abandoned. It was not sold to Barnum or any other individual until 1887. The particular block in question (the old railroad station site) was transferred to James T. Woodward on June 23, 1887 by the New York & Harlem Railroad Company. Mr. Woodward later became a member of the Madison Square Garden Company which was responsible for the erection of the building (Madison Square Garden). The Register states that "In the same year James T. Woodward granted to the Madison Square Garden Company the property now known as Block 856."<sup>14</sup> The fact that

this block remained within control of the railroad company fits in nicely with facts showing that the Hippodrome was leased for short periods of time to numerous persons and organizations when the circus was not in attendance. At least one fact is clear; neither Barnum and Hurd (treasurer of the circus) nor Coup bought the site for the Hippodrome. Secondly, Barnum's Great Roman Hippodrome Company started to erect a building in the fall of 1873 so that the circus could be set up within the shell of the structure, and it was covered by a spread of canvas, to protect the audience from the rain and cold.

The Hippotheatron fire necessitated Barnum, Coup and Hurd finding either another suitable building or a building site in New York. Apparently, Barnum was forced to perform at the American Institute Rink. Barnum was in New Orleans at the time of the fire and upon his return to New York he indicated his age prevented him from erecting... "in this city an establishment worthy of New York..."<sup>15</sup> in response to queries whether he intended to build a museum and menagerie. However, Barnum said, "I have it under consideration, and within a month shall determine whether or not I shall make another attempt."<sup>16</sup> Barnum's agents in Europe immediately set to work, after the fire, to replenish all of the animals and other materials in lieu of the circus opening in April 1874. There is no evidence to indicate that Barnum himself made any decision about a new site or a new building for the circus.

However, the amphitheater that was started in the fall of 1873 for the Barnum circus was not completed until the spring of 1874. Thus, the New York Hippodrome, as it was called, was completed during early April, 1874. A search of several New York newspapers but particularly the *Daily Graphic* was made and for March 5, 1874, the latter paper carries a story, along with two pictures, of the new circus structure. The newspaper account gives the reader a candid view of the exterior and interior features of this unique building. According to the account in the *Daily Graphic*, Barnum's Hippodrome was not fully completed until April 1, 1874. The circus was supposed to open on April 23rd (night) but this was delayed until April 27th due to last minute complications. The show remained until August 1, 1874. On August 2 the circus departed for an engagement in Boston which started on August 23. It was at this point that Coup and Barnum had a difference of opinion. Barnum insisted that his World's Fair or Congress of Nations take the road under canvas for the 1874 summer tour, and he turned the job over to John "Pogie" O'Brien, a grift-type manager. Barnum's son-in-law, Mr. Hurd toured with the Hippodrome and the season was fairly successful but O'Brien's tour was quite disappointing. However, Coup saw the impossibility of the operation of two shows and this so disturbed him that at the end of 1875, Coup left Barnum's



employe for good. Barnum unquestionably was the loser in this affair.

Van Rensselaer tells us that the building housing the circus was built of brick, iron, glass and wood. The central area was open and it was here that a canvas was stretched in order to keep out the elements. Flags flew from the main poles which supported the canvas. The *New York Herald* for April 28, 1874 tells about the opening night of April 27, 1874:

The long-promised 'Event of 1874' was consummated last night by the opening of Barnum's monster classical and zoological hippodrome, on the block bounded by Madison and Fourth Avenues and Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets. Whether it will prove the 'Event of 1874' or not it certainly must be acknowledged that it was the sensation of yesterday among the curiosity-loving citizens of the great metropolis, especially the young Arabs of the street, who made it a little more than a holiday by defying the natural foes, the knights of the club, and laughing at the well known watch-words, "Cheese it!"

#### SCENES AT THE OPENING

The programme for the evening has already been advertised in the *HERALD* and a dress rehearsal of the approaching pageant published in some of the city papers. Hence it is unnecessary to repeat here in detail the attractions that induced some

#### FIFTEEN THOUSAND

of the people of New York to gather in the locality above described between the hours of seven and nine last evening. Such a crush has never before been seen, relatively, at any public place of amusement in the city since the days of Ellen Tree or Fanny Ellsler at the old Park Theatre. The jam was so great that the police, although present in force, were almost powerless, although exercising their clubs vigorously upon the hats and heads of the surging crowd to make way for the egress to the open air of

#### A NUMBER OF LADIES WHO HAD FAINTED

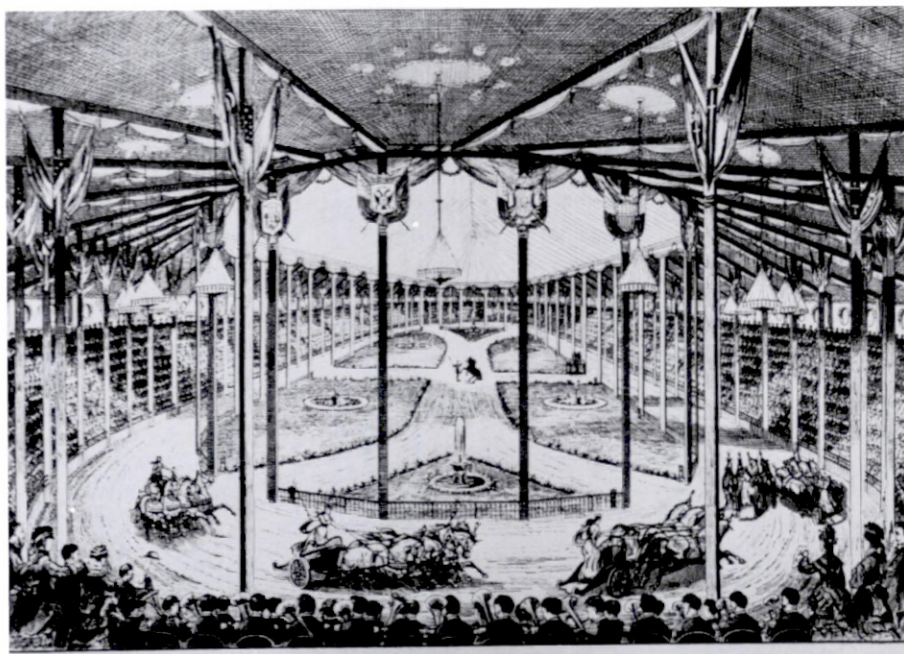
under the pressure of the multitude and the — air of the narrow box office at the main entrance to the building on Madison avenue.

#### VIEW OF THE SPECTACLE,

more grand than gilded chariots, more dazzling than haunting banners, of 10,000 eager and expectant human faces, all gazing with bright eyes, and with million gas jets shedding their brilliant lights above them upon the initial and chief pageant of the Hippodrome.

#### THE CONGRESS OF MONARCHS

We will briefly endeavor to describe this unique and really magnificent scene. Not far in the rear of the Queen



This drawing of the interior of the P. T. Barnum Grand Roman Hippodrome appeared in the *New York Daily Gazette* on March 5, 1875. Courtesy of the New York Historical Society, NYC.

of England, who seems to be very small for her age, comes a chariot emblematic of oppressed Ireland with the 'green above the red' and other recollections of the 'ould sod' displayed considerably. It was notable that while the air of 'God Save the Queen' created no particular enthusiasm, that of 'Wearing of the Green' created tumultuous applause. The audience certainly exhibited a prejudice in this relation. France did not arouse the spectators, but when the pope appeared there was another cordial greeting. The Sultan of Turkey and his harem suggested a remark from some one that 'Barnum' ought to represent Brigham Young and his wives in the next chariot. The ladies of these ragito of the Pasha of Egypt, mounted on camels, were not improved in beauty or grace — by their wiggie-waggie riding on the backs of the animals. But that may be the custom of the country. Those who 'saw the elephants' in the line of the cortage of the representative of India had their impressions improved in regard to the creature by the beautiful houris who were in the same company. The Celestial Empire was very correctly represented, and the music of the band when the Emperor and his suite appeared was sufficiently demonstrative of the ability of the industrious leader of the same when he struck up some air not exactly familiar to the uncultivated audience. But the crowning event of the pageant was the car that represented our own beloved Republic, and

its appearance was the signal for the most uproarious cheering, that has been heard since the period of Gilmore's colossal musical entertainments in Boston.

The *New York Herald* for May 14, 1874 reports the Hippodrome as "the largest amusement building ever constructed, . . ."

The reader might be interested in the prices charged. They were as follows: grand orchestra, \$1.50; orchestra, \$1.00; balcony, 75 cents; family circle, 50 cents and gallery, 25 cents. Private boxes, seating four, \$6.00.

Therefore, with the absence of Barnum at the Hippodrome, after August 2, 1874, the building was leased to various individuals and organizations. During August, Moody's religious rivals, dog and pony shows, plus other events were held in the Hippodrome. On October 1, 1874, Barnum's Hippodrome advertised that beginning on October 5 Edward Payson Weston would make his third and final attempt to walk five hundred miles in six days. He did accomplish 346 miles in the time allotted and then retired with "very sore feet." On November 2, Barnum entered with his Roman Hippodrome and on November 23rd *The Fete of Peking* was produced at a cost of \$100,000. L. B. Lent's Circus was at Terrace Garden on December 22, 1874 and for Christmas Barnum again presented *The Fete of Peking* and the spectacle of *Blue Beard*. Barnum closed the Hippodrome on February 27, 1875, but the circus Route Book states January 2. Then on March 1, 1875, Edward Weston and J. K. Judd began a walking race and "as an extra inducement, one could view Barnum's menagerie without extra charge." On March 8, Barnum gave a testimonial dinner and entertainment for Weston and a benefit for James M. Nixon on March 22, 1875. The Barnum & Bailey Route Book reports that Barnum reopened his Hippodrome on March 29,









in the matter. They therefore respectfully ask to be discharged from further consideration, and that the resolution be placed on file.

George F. Codington,  
William S. Kreps,  
Philip Cumisky,  
Special Committee 19

This document was referred to the Committee on Public Building. However, there was no further mention of the matter in any of the various committee reports. Actually, the building was too far along in construction to do anything about preventing its completion.

Apparently, the controversy stimulated the *Times* to publish another story on the Hippodrome. This one appeared just one day after the previous account appeared in the paper (Feb. 12, 1874):

Barnum's new Hippodrome is rapidly nearing completion. Mr. Coup, its general manager conducted a *Times* reporter around the premises yesterday, and had a long conversation with him concerning the complaints made by property-holders against the erection of the building in their neighborhood. He said that the Committee of the Assistant Board of Aldermen, accompanied by the representatives of the Board of Underwriters and Chief Engineer, Bates of the Fire Department, when they made their inspection, did so unattended by a representative of Mr. Barnum. Mr. Coup said that all he desired was to have the facts in the case fairly understood by the public. . . . Building will be 425 feet long, and 200 feet wide. The walls, of brick, are 28 feet high and will be covered with iron copings. The ring for the miscellaneous performances. . . will be oval shaped, 270 feet by 84 feet. One tier of seats is built around the ring, constructed of pine wood. The roof over the seats is of the same material, and will be covered with cement and gravel. A canopy of canvas will be raised over the arena to be used only in wet weather. On fair days the canopy will be lowered, and

This "punch-out" full color card was used to advertise the Barnum Circus at Madison & 4th Avenues (Madison Square Garden), in 1884. Harold Dunn Collection.

there will be no other covering. The space beneath the seats will be fitted up and arranged for a mammoth aquarium, aviary, museum, and menagerie. The floor will be cement, and Mr. Coup says that no more wood will be used in the structure than is actually necessary. . . . The plan of the building, he says, has been altered three times to suit the views of the Superintendent of Buildings, and at his suggestion, the seats will be cased underneath with tin or sheet-iron to prevent the wood from igniting by the gas used in lighting the space under them. Eight lines of gas-pipes will be run around the interior of the building, and from these chandeliers will descend over the seats, and globed gas-jets will branch out elsewhere. As the Hippodrome is only to be kept open in the Summer, no heating apparatus will be used, and the only fire in it will be that from the gas-lights. . . . As a precaution against fire six hydrants with hose attached will be placed at intervals across the length of the building, and one will also be placed at each corner of it in the space under the seats. On the recommendation of the Building Department a fire apparatus, denominated a 'spouting hose', will be attached to each of the forty pillars around the ring, and forty-five extinguishers will also be distributed around the building. . . . A number of property-owners in the neighborhood were not at all alarmed, and the opposition, he said, seemed to come from only one quarter. No application, he said, had been made to insurance companies, and yet several had offered to take risks, and Mr. Kingsley, of the Underwriters, had expressed the opinion that the building would be safe if the present plan was carried out. Mr. Coup, said, in conclusion, that he was willing to do anything reasonable to

satisfy everybody, but \$35,000 had been already expended on the building alone, and \$500,000 on the entire enterprise. Under these circumstances he did not care to abandon the project of a hippodrome on Fourth Avenue without a struggle.

The Hippodrome, after April 10, 1875, opened as Gilmore's Garden for summer evening concerts with P. S. Gilmore as conductor of his one hundred piece orchestra. On July 22, 1875 the New York *Herald* refers to the building as Gilmore's Concert Garden for the first time (late Hippodrome, future Madison Square Garden). Sheridan Shook and Patrick Gilmore (as managers) transformed the vast arena into a quiet, green, cool garden with many broad gravel walks, growing plants, blooming flowers and delightful refreshments. Cool and refreshing drinks were served on warm summer afternoons and evenings. Gilmore's Garden was still open in November 1875, and "what had now become dear to New Yorkers as Gilmore's Garden," continued into late autumn and winter 1875.

P. T. Barnum's New and Greatest Show on Earth entered the American Institute Building on April 27, 1876, and gave performances until May 6th when he departed for Stamford, Conn. for the long, hot summer and fall tour.

Sheridan Shook and Palmer (with E. G. Gilmore as business manager) took over Gilmore's again on May 11, 1876, and Gilmore's Band, with the lovable "Patsy" Gilmore performed in the Garden which bore his name. This was on Saturday evening,

In 1887 the Barnum & Forepaugh shows were combined for the New York engagement at Madison Square Garden. This courier booklet as well as the official route advises that the show opened on March 14, 1887. Pfening Collection.

**P.T. BARNUM & CO'S**  
AND  
**ADAM FOREPAUGH'S**  
TREMENDOUS  
**SHOWS COMBINED**  
MADISON SQUARE GARDEN FOR A SHORT SEASON  
**MONDAY MARCH 14th**  
THE MOST REPRESENTING THE GRANDEST  
COLOSSAL SHOWS ON EARTH EXHIBITION EVER KNOWN  
IMMENSE GREAT & ONLY  
**6 CIRCUSES** **2 ROMAN HIPPODROMES**  
GIGANTIC UNITED BIG  
**4 COMPLETE MENAGERIES** **4 CIRCUS RINGS**  
LARGEST HUGE OLYMPIAN  
**2 MUSEUMS OF THE WORLD** **2 ELEVATED STAGES**  
TITANIC THOROUGH BRED  
**60 PERFORMING ELEPHANTS** **500 PRIZE WINNING HORSES**  
BEST AND UNCLASSIFIED  
**200 MOST NOVEL ACTS** **1000 WONDERS UNITED**



June 10th. He received a wild welcome and easily remained for the entire summer.<sup>20</sup> The previous winter, Dwight Moody and Ira D. Sankey (sweet singer of religious songs that were sweeping the land) were frequently seen at the Garden. Gilmore's Band continued to about September 2, 1876, and on October 9 Barnum entered the Garden with the Carlo Family, Charles Fish, Martino Lowande and many others. Barnum departed on December 9, 1876.

During January 1877, various entertainments, including religious events, flower and dog shows were presented at Gilmore's Garden. But on April 9, 1877, Barnum's New and Greatest Show on Earth returned to Gilmore's Garden and left for Danbury, Conn. on May 6th. The circus season closed in November in Philadelphia without returning for an engagement in New York City.

As might be expected, Patsy Gilmore returned once again to Gilmore's on May 24, 1877, and the enjoyable band concerts and cool ocean breezes continued well into October 1877.<sup>21</sup> On October 22nd the Great London Circus and Sanger's British Menagerie entered Gilmore's Garden and departed on December 1, 1877. The London Circus returned on March 25, 1878 and remained through April. Again on May 25, 1878 Gilmore's Garden summer concerts started once again but Theodore Thomas and his famous orchestra was the entertainment. The London Circus played in opposition to Barnum who occupied the American Institute Building starting on April 5, 1878.

Theodore Thomas gave nightly concerts at Gilmore's starting on September 28, 1878, but Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth entered the famous building on October 14, 1878, and departed on November 30.<sup>22</sup> On December 23, Daniel P. O'Leary and P. Napoleon Campana entered a six-day walking race for some \$2,000. Then, in the heart of the winter season Gilmore's Garden was turned into a skating rink.<sup>23</sup> The name Gilmore was abandoned on May 22, 1879. The New York Times for May 22, 1879 reported the change:

Gilmore's Garden will hereafter be known as the 'Madison Square Garden'. Mr. Vanderbilt desired this change of

Another courier announced the "Closing days of the Glorious Carnival commencing April 4." This is the center spread of the other courier. Harold Dunn Collection.

name, and the new holders, Messrs. J. & L. F. Kuntz & Co. and Messrs. M. K. Botsford and O. H. Dodsworth, decided to acquiesce in the change, and so Mr. Vanderbilt insists that the Madison

This rare photograph was taken of the original Madison Square Garden in 1876. The illustration appeared in the 1945 Ringling-Barnum program in an ad for Park & Tilford.

Square Garden shall be the permanent title. The place will be transformed into a garden, with winding gravel walks nearly a mile long, through flower beds, shrubbery, and palm trees. The gas jets are to give way to the London Electric Light Company apparatus. They promise to light the garden with electricity successfully, and at a cost less by \$100 than is now paid for gas. On the evening of the 31st the garden will open for Summer night concerts. Harvey B. Dodsworth, with a band of 60 pieces will conduct them.

The role played by Vanderbilt in the name change is further evidence that the





railroad company owned the 1853 property.

In late June Fuller's electric light (referred to above), which had been recently introduced, lowered the temperature in the Garden some twenty-eight degrees.<sup>24</sup>

Again on April 12, 1879, Barnum opened his New and Greatest Show on Earth at the American Institute Building in New York; the circus remained until the 26th of the month. Barnum also played the same location in April (8-24), 1880.

Starting in the spring of 1881 (March 28 to April 16) and continuing through 1889, P. T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth and Howe's Great London Circus and Sanger's Royal British Menagerie opened at Madison Square Garden. The 1890 season was played under canvas in New York at 110th Street and Fifth Avenue because on August 7, 1889, workmen began to tear down the 1874 Hippodrome.

A highly interesting sidelight occurred in 1877. In late 1886 a dapper young man with a quiet manner, a magnetic personality and wide-awake Yankee shrewdness strolled along Broadway one sunny summer day and strolled away the next day. In his pocket was an exclusive lease on the Hippodrome for all circus privileges. The young upstart was the general agent for Adam Forepaugh Circus—Lewis E. Cooke. And then hist ye! hell popped! twenty hours and a missionary could not have made a louder noise. There were pleadings, beggings, threats but at first Cooke and Forepaugh would not give in to the Barnum interests. New Yorkers didn't know much about the Forepaugh Circus but the following weeks all they heard about and saw was Forepaugh. However, in the end a compromise was reached between Barnums' and Forepaugh's circus officials whereby the two circuses decided upon a combined engagement at M.S.G. It extended between March 14-16,

and the Barnum and the London Show remained there until April 23. Actually, this was not the first alliance between two shows because in 1886, at Philadelphia (April 26-May 1) the two joined hands for this one stand. Undoubtedly this gave Cooke and Forepaugh the idea of attempting to capture Madison Square for themselves in 1887, or was it just a good publicity stunt?<sup>25</sup>

From 1891 through 1897 Barnum & Bailey's Circus always opened their season at Madison Square Garden. After a Triumphant tour of Europe (1898 to 1902), The Greatest Show on Earth returned to the Garden in the spring of 1903 and continued to open there until 1918 (with the exception of 1909 when they opened in Chicago and did not play New York City that year). In 1919 Barnum & Bailey combined with Ringling Brothers World's Greatest Shows and the combined circuses have used the Garden for spring openings ever since.<sup>26</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Weather Vein*, Vol. 6 (2), 1926.

<sup>2</sup> *Architectural Record*, December, 1911, p. 12

<sup>3</sup> *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, March, 1894, p. 732

<sup>4</sup> *Survey*, April, 1911, pp. 131-135

<sup>5</sup> *Architectural Record*, December, 1911, p. 514

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 514

<sup>7</sup> T. Allston Brown, *A History of the American Stage* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., Inc., 1903), II, pp. 353-354

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354

<sup>9</sup> *Local Citation*

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, August 29, 1872, p. 8, col. 5

<sup>11</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, January, 1873, p. 29

<sup>12</sup> *Brown*, pp. 355-356

<sup>13</sup> *New York Herald*, October 12, 1873, p. 11

<sup>14</sup> *Courtesy, Register of the City of New York*

<sup>15</sup> P.T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs: or, The Life of P.T. Barnum* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1927), II, 688.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 688

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, February 10, 1874

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, February 11, 1874, p. 8

<sup>19</sup> Municipal Reference Library, New York Public Library, New York, May 9, 1968

<sup>20</sup> C.D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (15 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1927-1949) X, 115

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 296, 486

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 699

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 700

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 701

<sup>25</sup> *Billboard*, March 20, 1909, pp. 7, 31

<sup>26</sup> *Route Book of Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows*, 1945.

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*A Thousand Footnotes to History*

# CIRCUS WORLD MUSEUM PRESENTS THE PAPERS OF WILLIAM P. HALL

By Tom Parkinson For  
The Circus World Museum

## PART 2

### The William P. Hall Papers Pertaining To

#### JOHN ROBINSON

One of the Ralph Hadley snapshots of the Hall Farm shows a former John Robinson Circus cage, without wheels and placed along side one of the Hall barns. It carried the initials "JRC" and Bill Woodcock confirmed that at one time Hall and John Robinson made a trade that involved the cage. Dick Conover and others pegged this at 1910.

Now the William P. Hall Papers provide us with a fuller account of the deal and with corrected timing, although there are several points still to be uncovered.

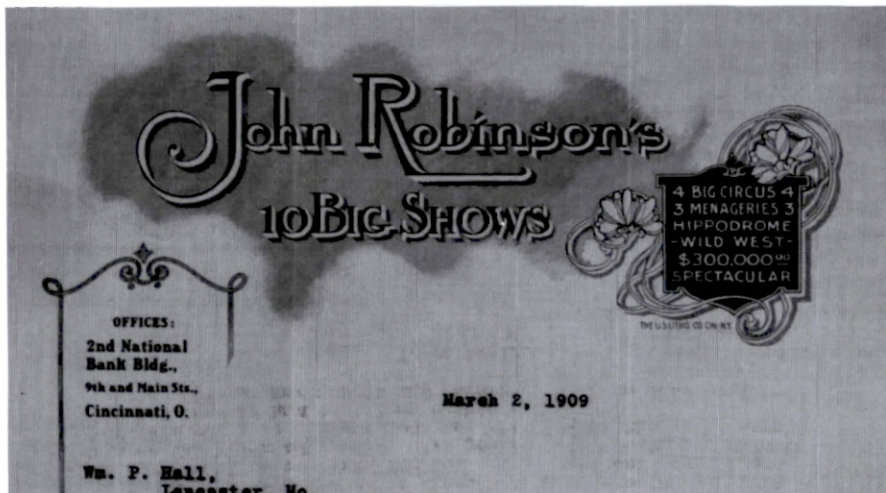
The initial piece is on the letterhead of the Horse King of the World, Wm. P. Hall, and is dated February 19, 1909:

"This is to certify that I have sold Jno. G. Robinson, Cincinnati, Ohio, forty head of horses at \$250 around to be delivered April 15th, 1909, in cars at Lancaster, Mo. Horses to be from four to eight years old, weight 1300 to 1500 pounds — colors 12 blacks, eight bays, 20 greys — to be inspected and received here. I will not be responsible for them in any way after they are received.

"I am taking property as follows in part payment: two elephants, one lioness, two leopards, six sacred cows, one Ornyx Antelope, one white deer, one tableau wagon, one big cage, two small cages, one flat car, one stock car and two coaches, all to amount to \$8475. Property to be delivered on track at Cincinnati, Ohio. After loaded I assume all responsibility of property mentioned. (signed) W. P. Hall." (WPH 2-19-09)

So that was the deal: The cage, animals, cars and wagons for 40 horses.

The next phase involves just part of the letter; the first page is missing but obviously is addressed to Hall by Robinson, who reports that he has started the mini-train of four cars, four wagons and the animals toward Lancaster. He sent Dick Jones with the stuff, and Jones was to teach Hall's man the routine performed by the elephants. "The elephants are quiet; anyone can take care of them, and he (Jones) can show you Tom's act and routine in a



The letterhead used by John Robinson's 10 Big Shows in 1909 was printed in dark green on light green paper. All letterheads from the Circus World Museum Collection and are the actual letters referred to in this article.

couple of days, so that anyone can work him." Thus, Tommy was one of the elephants; the other is not identified.

Robinson put the cat animals in the car to save Hall the express charges. The train was loaded with meat and hay enough for Jones to feed the animals unless there was to be a delay in Chicago. Then Robinson asked "When will you have horses for Mr. Wallace to look at? I might be able to ar-

The John Robinson 10 Big Shows is shown on the lot during the period around 1900. Woodcock Collection.



range to come up with him." (JGR-WPH undated 1909). One suspects this Mr. Wallace was Robinson's boss hostler, not the circus owner.

Hall apparently wrote to tell Robinson the stuff arrived. Then Robinson said that Dick Jones had returned and had reported all was well except the lioness caught cold and the elephants were a little thin on arrival. John G. Robinson urged Hall to send the horses earlier if possible because he wanted them to be over their shipping fever before the season started. (JGR-WPH 3-11-09).

The next document is on the Horse King of the World letterhead but it is signed by Robinson and dated April 12, 1909. It Reads:

"I have received and accepted 45 horses and waive all claims against W. P. Hall to date."





Thus, Hall sent 45 horses, five extras for some reason. It should be noted, too, that both documents in this transaction, the basic agreement and Robinson's receipt, were written on Hall letterheads. Moreover, they were written in the same handwriting. Hall's signature in the first and name in the second are identical. They appear to go a long way in proving that Hall not only could read and write, as has been questioned, but also could write a legible and mature hand. Other documents seem to cast doubt on this: some notes are in a crude scrawl. Perhaps a secretary wrote some of the notes. Most of the Hall letters are typed.

John G. Robinson signed the prewritten receipt which Hall may well have sent along with his horses. No doubt Hall's messenger brought the receipt back.

There is a chance that this messenger was Hall's brother. A final undated letter from Robinson figures in this. It says that Robinson had given Hall's brother \$25, not the \$15 Hall thought, so that Robinson figured he had \$10 coming. Speaking of Hall's brother, Robinson wrote, "He certainly must have reported this transaction to you. After we went to the express office and sent your money, he and I drove back to the lot and I gave him \$25 for expenses of hauling and stabling, etc." (JGR-WPH undated but probably 1909).

The question here revolves around whether that last letter described delivery of the 45 horses or some other purchase from Hall. It was written from Terrace Park, O., the Robinson quarters and home, and after the end of the 1909 season, with John G. home again.

This final undated letter takes up two other items of business. "In regard to the elephants", wrote Robinson in reference to different animals, "will say I will trade you one or two large ones for three small ones if they land all right. Are they Africans or Asiatic elephants? Let me know when they land so I can see them before they get so far west." This must refer to an offer from Hall to sell elephants he was importing.

Finally, Robinson wrote, "I have got a lot of show property for sale — wagons, canvas, cars and animals — so if anyone shows up out there and you cannot fix them up, refer them to me." (JGR-WPH undated, late 1909?) He also invited Hall

William P. Hall and friends pose alongside the water tank and big barn with a baby elephant and two zebras. A wire fence with tall posts at left indicates the picture was taken in the early years of Hall's circus activities, perhaps between 1905 and 1912. Hall wears the usual neckerchief. —CIRCUS WORLD MUSEUM PHOTO.

to stop by for a visit in Cincinnati if he should be going east that winter.

It may have been Hall who sent Al F. Wheeler to see John Robinson about a deal.

## The William P. Hall Papers Pertaining To

### AL F. WHEELER

During 1912, Al F. Wheeler had some significant correspondence with John G. Robinson, and — amazingly — the letters of both parties survive in the William P. Hall Papers of the Circus World Museum.

Wheeler had asked Robinson about selling the John Robinson Ten Big Shows, and the reply was that it could be had much cheaper in the spring than in the fall. It will be recalled that the Robinson show was in money difficulties and off the road in 1912. However, Robinson told Wheeler that the "band wagons, tableaux and all of

The 1912 letterhead of Downie & Wheeler, and signed by Al F. Wheeler, is printed in gold with red outline.



the cages are repaired, painted and ready for the road." He had disposed of most baggage stock but the ring stock was intact. There were:

"In all, about 30 head; this includes three somerset ring horses, four duns that run for a four-horse act, two sets of carrying horses, four trick horses, five manege horses, two hurdle mules and one kicking mule."

Robinson did offer to store all of the wagons, cars and show property until fall if Wheeler would make a deal now and take the livestock. John G. was weary of feeding all of that stock. (JGR-WPH 5/24/12).

Wheeler was interested. He asked Robinson for an inventory and for "your lowest spot cash price for the same, including use of the title for a term of not less than 20 years . . . Give careful attention on estimating your train as some of your cars are in very bad condition . . ." Wheeler also asked for prices on the wild animal acts which John G. Robinson had purchased at the sale of Danny Robinson's show. (AFW-JGR-5/27/12).

On the same day, Wheeler had written to Hall to report on the stock which Downie & Wheeler Circus had gotten from Hall. "We now have all of the horses in harness and they are doing fine. Do not think there is a lemon in the bunch and very much pleased with them." He also sent Robinson's earlier letter for Hall to see. (AFW-WPH 5/27/12).

In reply, Robinson said he would sell the four-lion act and the four-leopard act for \$4,000. Then he said he would send that inventory to Wheeler if he was really interested in buying a big show and quickly.

"Will sell the big show," he said, "for \$160,000 cash, or if time and mortgage are wanted, will have to get \$200,000, and lease the title to you for ten years . . ." John G. claimed he was planning to take the show back on the road if Wheeler didn't take it. (JGR-AFW 6/5/12). But \$160,000 or \$200,000!

The price might have been in line with some of those claimed for transfer of shows like Forepaugh-Sells, Barnum & Bailey and other big ones. Sure, John Robinson had been a major show, but there was a difference, and these were not prosperous times.

The price was more than Wheeler had



counted on and so much more than the prices on other shows in the ken of Hall and Wheeler that it shocked Wheeler. So his sense of humor took over.

Wheeler bundled Robinson's letter off to Hall with the comment that he guessed Robinson "will always own a show, judging from these figures." (AFW-WPH 6/8/12). Then he added that the Downie & Wheeler horses "are in collar now, the colts working like old-timers."

Eventually, Robinson sold out to Jerry Mugivan at a reported "\$30,000 or \$40,000." Perhaps, Wheeler, too, would have made the purchase at that price.

Late in the 1912 season, there were letters on other topics. Wheeler said Downie & Wheeler would sell some horses, working through Hall's Eastern agent, Meng Bros., in Philadelphia. (AFW-WPH 9/29/12). Later he reported that Meng did buy nine horses and that Wheeler "might do a wagon show again." (AFW-WPH 11/1/12). During the winter he said he would need an elephant, camels, and lion for his wagon show. (AFW-WPH 2/5/13).

That particular wagon show didn't come off then, and Downie & Wheeler continued for 1913. It was Andrew Downie who told Hall about the split-up of that show at the end of the season. He said that he had gotten most of that property and that Wheeler would want a lot of property for a ten-car show for 1914 and would be in touch with Hall. (See Andrew Downie chapter). He predicted Wheeler would want two elephants.

As the partners began to frame separate shows, Wheeler was back in touch with Hall on his own and did acquire two elephants. He wrote once that the bulls had arrived. (AFW-WPH 1/20/14) and later identified them as Queen and Jennie.

In the latter letter he told Hall that a Mexican was en route from Mexico to the Wheeler quarters with a number of steers and a language problem. Wheeler asked Hall to go to St. Louis and watch for the man and steers so as to see if all were well. Wheeler feared the man would run out of feed or face other problems and have no one who could understand Spanish. (AFW-WPH 3/30/14). At the end of that season Wheeler offered to sell some wild animals to Hall. (AFW-WPH 10/21/14).

Wheeler asked Hall to order a 40-foot Circle 2 stock car because he would be wanting Hall to ship him 24 head of horses.



William P. Hall, done up in his best bib and tucker, gestures for the photographer to wait, but it is too late. The shot already is taken to show the barns, office (now in dark

paint), fence and elephant. The distinguished visitor probably is a show owner but at this point he has not yet been identified. — CIRCUS WORLD MUSEUM PHOTO.

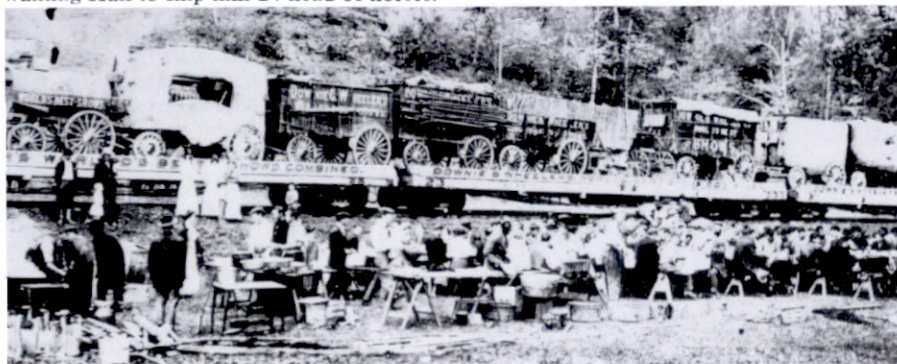
(AFW-WPH 3/27/15). But the season of 1915 didn't go so well for Wheeler's wagon show. By June he was asking Hall for more time on his note. He would need grace on the note, he said, so kindly hold. "Do not let same go to protest," Wheeler asked. "I have never had a note protested and don't want that to happen now." (AFW-WPH 6/25/15).

In 1916 Wheeler had a big 30-car railroad show and got some or all of his elephants from Hall. In March he wrote that he was sending a man for the elephants. (AFW-WPH 3/27/16).

The next surviving letter was written three years later, but the two men had conducted business in between. In advance of the 1919 tour, Wheeler asked Hall to describe the LaMont Bros. cages that were for sale, adding that he might use two. Then Al F. responded to Hall's earlier mention of horses:

"Yes, you certainly did give me a dirty deal on that last horse proposition and it was beyond me to understand why you would try to pull something like that on a good customer and Hall booster, which up to that time I had been." Then with the over-the-dam attitude that most horse traders seem to have had, Wheeler said,

**The Downie & Wheeler Shows train is shown during a watering and feeding stop during the 1912 season. Tom Parkinson Collection.**



## The William P. Hall Papers Pertaining To ANDREW DOWNIE

Most of Andrew Downie's surviving correspondence with William P. Hall came after the split-up of the Downie & Wheeler partnership. In late 1913 Downie had asked if the elephant-pony-dog act on the Young Buffalo show belonged to Hall. This act got much favorable attention from many people. Now Downie wanted to buy it "for a six-car show next year." He wrote from the 12-car Downie & Wheeler show, thus indicating a split for the next season. (AD-WPH 9/18/13).

Later Downie wrote to Hall about the actual division of the Downie & Wheeler property:

"I dissolved partnership with Mr. Wheeler last week and we divided up the property and each took half of the stock, and all the animals, wagons and cars that we did not have duplicates of, we put up for sale between the two of us, and the highest bidder got it . . . Mr. Wheeler wants a whole lot of show property as he is figuring on putting out a ten-car show and I got the biggest part of the outfit we had."

Downie planned to visit Lancaster, although he could not come until he got a winter quarters into shape and his stuff stored for the winter. Then he would come to Lancaster and he offered to do Al Wheeler's shopping at Hall's circus mart as



well as his own. (AD-WPH, undated Sunday, 1913).

That Downie letter also recorded that Frank A. Robbins had loaded up his circus and changed winter quarters, moving from Oxford, O., to the fairgrounds at Trenton, N. J. Downie's own quarters were at Timonium, Md. His part of the former Downie & Wheeler show had arrived on a snowy and rainy Saturday. Nearly all of Downie's bosses were home for a week's vacation, and he must struggle with the problem of getting things stored and getting heat for the buildings and supplies for the animals before he could consider going to Hall's farm. (AD-WPH, undated *ibid.*)

What Downie got from Hall for the 1914 circus is not recorded in the Hall Papers, but it probably included horses. In August, 1914, Downie was paying Hall \$520 on a note from the LaTena Circus of 1914.

At the end of that season, Downie offered to bid for Hall at an animal sale scheduled for Wilmington, Del., Downie expected someone named Harvey to be a buyer and he said that (D. Clinton) Cook was planning a ten-car show. "He has about \$30,000 to squander," said Downie, who explained that Cook was in the ice business and wanted to be a circus man. (AD-WPH 11/19/14). Other sources show that Cook didn't make it that time; it took another year for the Cook & Wilson Circus to develop.

In 1915 both Wheeler and Downie got horses from Hall. Downie wrote that his LaTena Circus needed six big greys and other horses for which he would trade cages. (AD-WPH 2/15/15). Two months later, the deal made, Downie wrote to complain to Hall about the poor quality of horses he had received. (AD-WPH 4/26/15).

War-time circusing was reflected in just one of the Hall Papers, and it came from Downie with the familiar plea that he could not pay at the time. He had lost \$9,000 in Canada. The bottom had dropped out of business when army troops were moved out of the towns. Downie tried to route out of Canada but ran into difficulties headed up by opposition from Coop & Lent. (AD-WPH 8/6/16).



The 1913 Downie & Wheeler letterpaper has a gold title on red background. The photos of owners are in black. Andrew Downie's signature appears on this one.

Downie's next letters came from his Walter L. Main Circus. As he often did, Downie failed in several cases to date these letters. In the first, Downie said he wanted a mule act and some elephants, "not one of the two with the bum trunk. Could use the one you got from Ringling. I believe it was a Lockhart bull." Then he added that "Jones let me have a lot of stuff..." (AD-WPH March 11, undated).

The second one was written on a Sunday, probably 1924, and it puts an interesting light on the management of baggage stock. Downie wanted big dapple greys — 1800 pounds — for wheel horses.

"Am going to make eight-horse teams out of sixes and sixes out of fours." To do this he would insert the new and heavier wheel horses between the original wheel horses and the wagons.

Then Hall got a letter from Ed Heinz on the letterhead of the Walter L. Main & Andrew Downie Combined Circus, dated February 25, 1924, thus helping to date Downie's letter. Heinz said that Downie wanted to buy some 1800-pound horses. "Don't tell him I wrote you, as he may think I am getting a percentage from you," said Heinz to Hall. And what better way to raise the possibility of just such a percentage? (EH-WPH 2/25/24).

The midway of the Downie & Wheeler Show is pictured during the 1912 season. Harold Dunn Collection.



Soon Downie would be selling this outfit to the Miller brothers and then trying a motorized circus on his own. He left no more letters in the William P. Hall Papers.

## The William P. Hall Papers Pertaining To The

### COOP & LENT CIRCUS

Trouble was the name of the game with many circuses serviced by William P. Hall, and one of them was the Coop & Lent railroad show. The 1916 edition started out differently, when it could pay 12 weeks rent in advance on the elephants. Hall got that \$1440 on the leased bulls in April in a letter from Frank Kanak two days before the season opened. The letterhead listed him along with L. J. Stark, F. C. Cooper and Hall's old reliable, Art Eldridge, as owners. The cash went to Banker W. A. Higbee to apply on Hall's deal. (FJ-WPH 4-27-16).

The show had gotten nearly all of its gear from Hall. At the end of the season Stark shuffled partners some and moved the show quarters from Cedar Rapids, Ia., to Dixon, Ill.

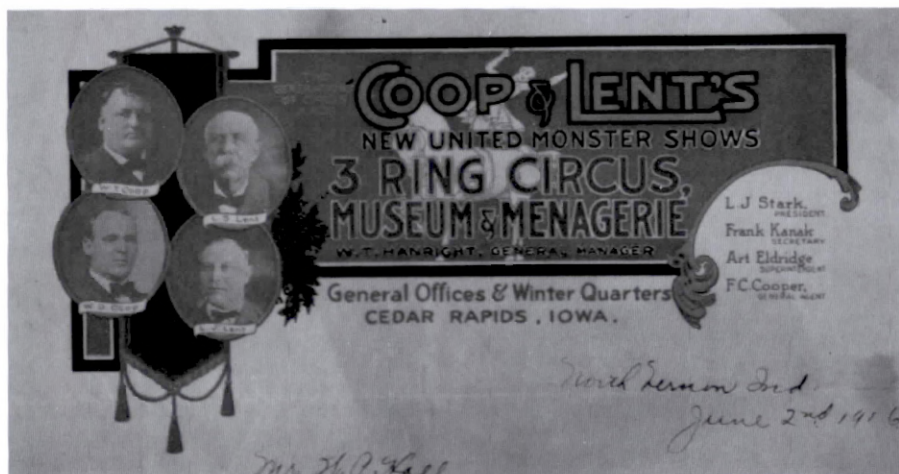
The 1917 show listed Stark and Ed Fuller as owners, with Jess Adkins as manager. Adkins had several dealings with Hall in his early days.

On May 6 a fire on the train killed three out of the four elephants leased from Hall. It was Adkins who wrote to Hall a few days later to summarize their new arrangements:

Adkins sent Hall a note covering the cost of the new elephants and asked that they be shipped. The letter implies they would come from Baraboo, so Hall probably bought some there to resupply Coop & Lent.

Instructions from Adkins were that Hall would return the other note including one for the four elephants, and send a new lease covering the elephant we have and the two you are to furnish. When the \$3500 check is covered, Hall was to give credit on the enclosed \$1800 note; the other \$1700 is to cover the lease for the entire season for the three elephants and the railroad car. Adkins reported that they had received the damaged stock car back from the repair shop the day before at Crestline, O. and that it was in first class condition





again. The note he enclosed was for \$6300 at 7 percent. (JHA-WPH 5-17-17).

That was the extent of Coop & Lent correspondence in the William P. Hall Papers — and nearly the end for Coop & Lent. It folded the next month and was sold by sheriff to L. S. Horne, Kansas City, who would put it out the next year for an abortive tour on trucks.

## The William P. Hall Papers Pertaining To The THE RINGLING BROS.

While circus historians sometimes have pictured William P. Hall as a dealer in outlaw animals and dilapidated wagons, the William P. Hall Papers now tell us that this was not the entire story. Hall not only sold to shoestring shows but he also counted the prestigious Ringlings among his customers.

True, they bought wild animals and horses from Hall, and more often he wanted to buy wagons from them. But he was in frequent contact with the Baraboo brothers.

The first Ringling Bros. letterhead in the Papers refers indirectly to a circus transaction that never came off. Rhoda Royal, Ringling Bros.' horse trainer, wrote to tell Hall that he wanted eight horses and that he would be putting 20 trained horses on the Hagenbeck show this year. This was 1906. The Carl Hagenbeck Wild Animal Show was in serious financial trouble and had negotiated a deal to combine its outfit with the Forepaugh show, which was owned by the Ringlings. Royal was getting ready to break horses for the new show. He asked that the stock be shipped to Baraboo and he asked for credit and time — a sign that he was buying the horses personally rather than for the Ringlings. But the combining of the two shows never came off. The Hagenbeck people combined with the Wallace show instead; one hopes that Royal was not stuck with eight or 20 extra horses. (RR-WPH 1906).

After that it was usually the Ringlings

**The Coop & Lent's New United Monster Shows of 1916 letterhead is printed in blue with title in yellow with red outline.**

themselves who wrote to Hall, with the Ringling, Barnum and Forepaugh shows all involved.

Barnum & Bailey reported to Hall that two elephants had been shipped from Bridgeport to Lancaster. (BB-WPH 8-28-07). As the season neared an end for Forepaugh and Ringling, the Ringlings offered to sell baggage stock that would not be needed in the winter. Hall was invited to catch the shows at late stands and their routes were enclosed. The surplus stock would include 40 ponies, at Baraboo, 30 more on the shows, and 150 head of horses. (RB-WPH 11-7-07).

The Ringlings told Hall they would not need additional baggage horses for 1909 and we know now that it would be because they were not taking out the Forepaugh show and all that stock would be surplus to equip the other two shows. They went on to say, "Concerning the property of which we wrote, we now have rented the Forepaugh elephants for the coming season." They told Hall they still had surplus

**Mrs. Rhoda Royal is shown up on her horses on the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows in 1905. Pfening Collection.**



baggage wagons, cars, etc. (RB-1-29-09). Separately we know the bulls were rented to the Gollmar show.

While the Forepaugh show languished on the shelf through 1909, Hall kept after the chance to buy it. C. C. Wilson, his old contact with the Harris show and now traffic manager for the Ringlings, said, "As I do not know what the firm plans are for the Forepaugh-Sells show, I cannot say as to what they will think of your proposition . . . Talk with Otto at Kirksville, Mo." (CCW-WPH 8-27-09).

So Hall caught the Barnum & Bailey at Kirksville, and later Otto wrote, "First of all, I wish to tell you that we have decided to put out the Forepaugh-Sells Show next season, which of course makes it impossible to consider any proposition of the nature which you made when we met at Kirksville." Otto went on to say that they would need lots of horses for Ringling, Barnum and Forepaugh. (OR-WPH 9-30-09).

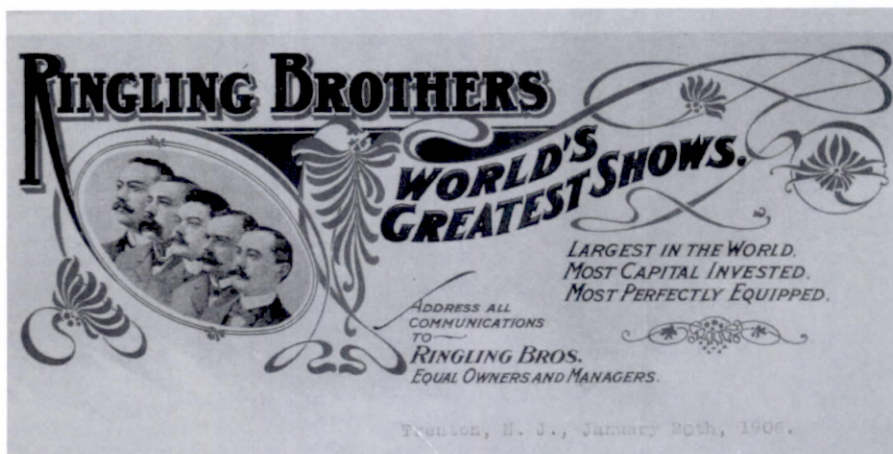
Consequently, Otto wrote again on Barnum & Bailey letterhead to say he wanted "heavy boned, short coupled chunks to weigh not less than 1500 pounds up to 1700 or 1800 pounds, dark greys or dapples. They must be the right pattern and sound." (OR-WPH 12-3-09).

Charles Ringling wrote that Ringling Bros. would buy two or three good lions. (CR-WPH 1-12-10). Al Ringling wrote on Forepaugh paper that a check had been received and they had shipped an unidentified elephant to Hall. (AR 4-17-11).

And then the Forepaugh equipment was the subject again. Charles Ringling wrote that he had tried to understand the long distance phone call and could only guess that Hall was calling about the Forepaugh show. Charles noted that the show closed November 11 and that they would be glad to show it to Hall. (CR-WPH 11-6-11). Then an unsigned cover letter transmitted to Hall a copy of the printed list of Forepaugh property for sale. (RB-WPH 1-18-1912).

Sam McCracken, the Barnum & Bailey manager, wrote that he was enclosing \$3450 for eight horses of one type and 12 of another. He was deducting "\$1500 for





elephant as charged by Hall." But he wasn't exactly elated over their horse deal. One \$300 horse was not covered in the above amount "as his wind is so bad that we cannot work him only on very light trips and we will send him back to you when we show Ottumwa if you like. As per our telegram, we were somewhat disappointed in the white mare, as she was so young that we will not be able to use her for at least a year. There were four or five of the other horses very light but we will dispose of them later on." Even so, he would want to buy four-horse chariot teams—four whites and four blacks. (SM-WPH 7-22-13).

If he was unhappy with that deal, it didn't show in January. McCracken said then they would want 30 head of horses in the spring, about March 1. "You can quote us your price on good dapple grey baggage horses, 1700 to 1800 pounds. Now we are not going to buy light horses and you know what we want..." (SM-WPH 1-7-14).

The scattered letters from Ringling in the remaining years were of a miscellaneous nature. Wilson offered to sell a Barnum & Bailey car that had been left in the Chicago yards. It would accommodate 70 people and was 60 feet long. (CCW-WPH 10-24-14). Ralph W. Peckham wrote that he had made the railroad contracts for shipping elephants from Baraboo to Titusville, Pa. Hall then sold elephants to a show in the east and had bought some from Ringling to fill the bill. The buyer was probably Coop & Lent. (RWP-WPH 5-25-17).

On combined Ringling-Barnum paper signed "Ringling Bros." came a sharp complaint about a horse deal they had just completed with Hall. (RB-WPH 2-11-22). Charles Ringling thanked Hall for three Christmas turkeys and reported he had given one to John, one to Charles's daughter's family and the biggest he had kept for himself. (CR-WPH 1-2-23). In a Ringling-Barnum letter, F. J. Warrell said that Ringling did not have a hippo it would sell. (FJW-WPH 1-11-25). And in the last Ringling piece in the Hall Papers, the show offered from Sarasota to sell a male elephant to Hall. (RBBB-WPH 12-14-27).

**The Rhoda Royal signature appears on this 1906 Ringling Bros. paper. The title is in black shaded in gold with World's Greatest Shows in red.**

In an allied vein, Alf Ringling signed a letter from the R. T. Richards Circus to Hall, evidence that this Ringling took an active role in operation of his son's circus. The letter was for transmitting a check for \$132 and to ask, "Did you express the calliope?" (ATR-WPH 4-21-17).

## **The William P. Hall Papers Pertaining To The PALMER BROS. CIRCUS**

Wagon historians know that the Palmer Bros. Circus of 1921 included some former Howes Great London property and that Jerry Mugivan had purchased the Yankee Robinson Circus from Fred Buchanan after the 1920 season, thus leaving Buchanan at liberty.

That background comes into play in fol-

**A group of hands take a break at the "juice joint" on the midway of the Ringling show in 1906. C.P. Fox Collection.**



lowing the developments that the William P. Hall Papers reveal about the Palmer show. The Hall Papers, at the Circus World Museum, include just a few Palmer letters and telegrams. As in most such cases, there are some questions still pending. Nevertheless, the Hall Collection provides insight into a hitherto forgotten episode in circus history in which Buchanan, one of the most unpopular showmen, tried to take over the Palmer show.

The first item is a wire from W. F. (Doc) Palmer to Jerry Mugivan, who was in Ontario with the John Robinson show. Apparently, an earlier communication had opened the subject. Now Palmer said:

"Buchanan worked every scheme possible and has accomplished nothing but still spreading poison..." (WFP-JM 5-17-21). Palmer said he was writing the details and that his business in South Dakota was good.

Then comes the letter. It confirms that Mugivan had wired Palmer earlier, perhaps as a warning about Buchanan. It says:

"Dear Jerry:

"I am going to try and explain everything in detail as near as I can to make conditions plain to you. In the first place, I have never sent for Buchanan, asked or received any favors from him in any way whatsoever. He came to the show about the time you wired me before, on the pretense of passing through, etc. I treated him with due courtesy.

"He propositioned me in many ways. His first attempt was to get me to induce Backman and Tinsch (Palmer's partners) to sell their interest to him. I declined every proposition he made, as I do not care to be mixed up in any way with a guy like Buchanan. He and his brother came on the show up in Nebraska, stuck around three days and then sneaked away like a snake in the grass.

"That happened to be at the end of the disastrous week and the only really bad week's business we have had since the opening. They succeeded in throwing the scare into Mr. Tinsch and through this channel attempted to force dissolution. This move was started in Deadwood. Having



armed myself with sufficient evidence to justify a libel suit on the grounds of conspiracy to defraud, I succeeded in stopping the move. The next day at Rapid City another attempt was made through an attorney, a schoolmate of Buchanan's who lived there. I blocked this, for in the meantime I had convinced this man Tinsch what the result would be, and now I think Buchanan has reached the end of his rope.

"Of course, in the meantime, Buck has been over and thrown the scare into Wortham who we owe ten thousand dollars in the form of two notes. We have about a month before the first one is due. We owe no other money that amounts to anything at all, except that we owe Howes London Shows Co. and \$2930.00 to William P. Hall. Now if our business continues as it is, we will have sufficient funds to meet every obligation."

Palmer continued on other subjects. He asked Mugivan for aid in securing a bond, since the show's application to the National Security Co. was rejected.

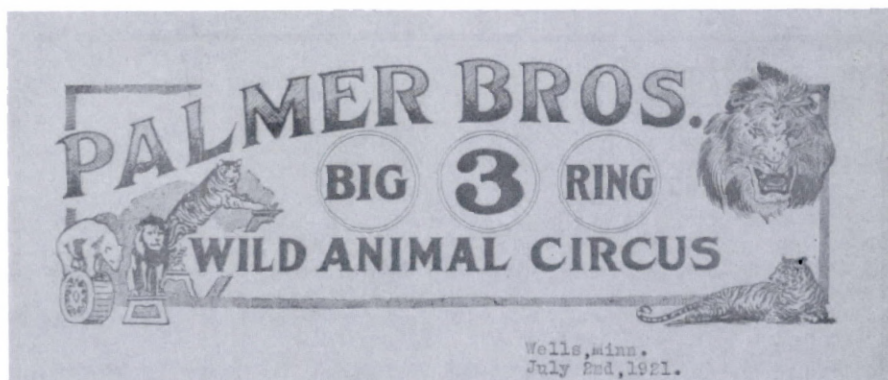
"Now, Jerry, I am going to put this thing over," Palmer declared, "because it looks good on the lot and on the street."

"We had quite a bad little wreck going into Hot Springs but were able to give a night's performance and got fifteen hundred."

That railroad wreck is the same one recorded by a well-circulated photograph that is saved mostly because it shows the Palmer Bros. steam calliope. It also shows a few wagons in the ditch. It happened June 10, 1921 and that Hot Springs is the one in South Dakota.

"Had a blowdown during the performance at Rapid City — crippled three of our people, however not seriously, and the fortunate part of the whole thing was not a sucker got a scratch and we grossed twenty two fifty," Palmer wrote.

The next surviving document is a telegram from Danny Odom, manager of the Howes Great London show, then in Duluth, and to Jerry Mugivan in Toronto, with the Robinson show. The wire was quite a hodgepodge:



The Palmer Bros. 1921 letterhead is printed in a green-blue ink, and is signed by W. F. Palmer.

"Saw Wortham and he says that Buchanan is trying to get Palmer show and that Wortham has eleven thousand dollars loaned to the show and that he wants to protect himself. I wired Schuyler County Bank to hold notes. Also got wire from Doc Palmer that show doing better business and that Buchanan was trying to get show. Wortham says he will not push Palmer if he will help to protect him. I wired Palmer that he would not push him on his payments."

So Wortham was all right. And Danny had contacted the Schuyler County Bank. That, of course, was Higbee, the banker through whom William P. Hall routed all of his banking transactions. Presumably, that would take care of the \$2930. The telegram was sent June 19.

The next day Mugivan wrote to Palmer from Toronto to say that he had received Palmer's letter and "note the conditions as you state."

"Just as I told you last winter about what would happen to you by mixing up with that agent," he wrote. More than once,

This photo of the Palmer Bros. Circus train wreck is one of the very few photos available of the Palmer show. Pfening Collection.

Jerry Mugivan blamed more than routing judgment troubles on agents, but in this case the available documents do not indicate how an agent figured in the plot and there is no mention of the agent's name.

Mugivan went on: "Will do anything to help you keep Buchanan from trimming you." He also told Palmer how to proceed in getting a surety bond. And he told him of Odom's report that "Wortham was satisfied to wait and to protect himself." (JMM-WFP 6-20-21).

On the same day, Mugivan wrote to William P. Hall and enclosed "a couple of wires and letters which are self explanatory." That explains how these items reached Hall and came eventually to the Circus World Museum. Hall obviously ignored Mugivan's instructions: "After you have read them, wish you would please return for our files." (JM-WPH 6-20-21).

Now it was Palmer's turn to write Hall. On July 2, 1921, he explained that he had been called away from the show and therefore was a couple of days late in mailing the draft on the first note as it came due. This letter was for transmitting the draft. Apparently, it was horses that Palmer had gotten from Hall, because he reported the "Stock all in first class shape and we are getting along very nicely." (WFP-WPH 7-2-21).

On August 1, there was a similar letter carrying a check for "\$513 in payment on your second note due this date." That was from Glasgow, Mont. (WFP-WPH 8-1-21).

So Buchanan was beaten off. Palmer, Tinsch and Backman continued with the show. But that didn't mean a lack of problems. While the Hall Papers reveal no more on the topic, we know from other sources that the Palmer Bros. Circus closed in Palo Alto, Calif., on November 5. The Billboard of November 19 said it was after Palmer had left with the funds, but the Billboard of December 10 said it was because Palmer was in ill health.

There is no immediate indication that Wortham did or didn't get any money or that Hall got all of his. If Palmer Bros. still owed Jerry Mugivan for the show itself, he must have gotten that when it was sold to Mike Golden and M. B. Runkle that December. Doc Palmer went back to the side show business and is best remembered for having created remarkable Siamese Twins and a Two-Headed Boy.





# THEY MADE IT CLICK

BY SVERRE O. AND FAYE O. BRAATHEN

Sitting in the backyard of the Ringling-Barnum Circus in Detroit, Michigan, on Sunday, July 12, 1953, we were talking to the show's physician, Dr. Bryan Roberts. We had traveled with the show through eastern Canada and Detroit was the first American stand after the Canadian tour. That year it was still a big railway tented circus traveling on seventy double length stocks, flats and sleepers in three sections. We were alone, for the few performers who had arrived on the lot were having their noon lunch in the cookhouse. The generator used to light the big top, dressing wagons and lesser tents was silent for it was yet too early for it to go into service. Conversation was easy on this quiet summer day, and we talked about a number of things. Finally Dr. Roberts commented, "You know I've now traveled long enough with this circus to have discovered what makes it click. I am firmly convinced that a bolt of lightning could strike the lot, killing every workman, and the show would go on. It's the bosses that move this show, get it up every morning and torn down every night. If catastrophe struck today and robbed us of every workman, the bosses would commandeer the services of the performers, ushers, candy butchers and ticket sellers and they'd get it up and take it down until a new crew could be recruited and trained."

He was right, as World War II proved. During the war the demands of the military services together with the high wage scales of industry made it exceedingly difficult to recruit and retain a sufficient number of men to man any circus tour. Fortunately for the Ringling organization most of the department heads were men of long experience and too old for military service. True to the long, long tradition of loyalty to the circus these men struggled and sweat day in and day out as they labored with a motley crew to move the show, to "put'er up and take'er down." For the most part the workmen were either too old or were physically unfit for army or navy and they were in scant supply at that. So the bosses turned to the performers, the ushers and the candy butchers, and these were supplemented by local youngsters who habitually swarm to a circus lot.

The department heads found a willing corps of helpers in the performers. Girls accustomed to rhinestones and spangles donned blue jeans and canvas gloves and carried from the wagons the folding chairs for the reserved seat sections. They assisted men in lugging ropes and riggings. They did whatever their strength permitted. The male performing staff forgot for a few hours the plaudits of the multitudes and turned with willing hands to carry jacks and stringers, ring curbs and elephant pedestals. They lugged the trunks from wagons to dressing

rooms and back again at night. Circus owners and executives stood with folded dollar bills between their fingers waiting to pay each performer for this work just as the bosses had always paid the "towners" for such. When Robert Ringling handed the celebrated high wire artist, Helen Wallenda, her quota of dollar bills for her work in erecting and tearing down the grandstand chairs she asked him to autograph those she received after her first day of work. As he complied Helen remarked, "You know, Mr. Robert, this is the first money I've ever earned," and she looked a bit ruefully at the blisters on her hands. We have one of these dollar bills in our circus collection.

Since the day when circuses combined menagerie, sideshow and main performance, and began to follow a route through the country for an entire season, organization has been essential to their existence. As circuses grew in size, so too grew the need for careful planning. Such mammoth shows as the Barnum & Bailey, the Ringling Bros., and the combined Ringling-Barnum Circus, which for many years made trans-continental tours on from 80 to 106 stocks, flats and sleepers (divided into three and four sections) became highly departmentalized. The head of each department was absolute boss of the men assigned to him. These shows carried upwards of 1,600 people. It is obvious that the problems, queries and complaints of so many people could not be daily dealt with by the owner or general manager.

It was important that each department operate at maximum efficiency at all times. Should one department fail to properly execute its duties on any given day the business done would suffer. Circus owners strove always to find the best possible men to head each department. The department heads, in turn, strove to procure the most skilled assistants possible. For many years the average tenure of the common laborer on the larger circuses was about nine days. As long as the days remained sunny and the heat did not become too oppressive the majority of these men labored contentedly, grateful for good food and the wandering life. But let the circus run into a spell of wretched weather and it could expect wholesale desertions from the ranks of the roustabouts. Also when the show went into Chicago for its nine day stand every summer it never knew on the night of the second Sunday how many men would be left behind on skid row. Many of these workmen were itinerants intent upon getting transportation to some wheat country at harvest time, some tobacco country for tobacco picking, or some similar objective. The circuses had to maintain rather constant recruitment services, and bosses had to each day teach and train laborers the

while they never ceased to supervise the work of all. Department heads became perforce efficiency experts, adept at teaching men to accomplish a given task with a minimum of motion. Because most of the men had no home the band had to play something else then Home Sweet Home at the close of the last performance of the season.

The work of the big top canvasman was perhaps as technical as that demanded of any department head. It was essential that he have a small corps of skilled assistants and a much larger crew of common laborers. In the early days of the big circuses the big top boss canvasman had to lay out the lot, using for this purpose maps or sketches made for him by the twenty-four hour man who had preceded him into a city. Later the Ringling-Barnum Show employed a layer-out skilled in fitting the confines of any lot the main tents together with as many as forty lesser ones. The big top boss had to be something of a weather prophet. The big tents would shrink appreciably should rain soak them after they were in the air, and if packed wet they

James Whelan, one of the great boss canvasmen of all time, came to Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows from the Walter L. Main Circus. Whelan is shown here on the Ringling-Barnum show in 1934. Pfening Collection.





would expand considerably after being erected on a sunny day. Almost every afternoon you would see the big top boss canvasman taking a crew of big top men around the tent to guy out the tent and would bark out such words as "take it, shake it, make it, next." Allowances had to be made for these contingencies. The size and shape of lots, their grades, the type of subsoil encountered, and the degree of friendliness of adjacent lot owners all played a role in the problem confronting the big top boss canvasman from day to day as the circus moved from city to city and state to state.

One year the Ringling-Barnum Circus played Mankato, Minnesota to give a matinee only. When the circus arrived on the lot it was discovered that stakes could not be driven into the ground because it was underlain with a deep stratum of solid rock. No other lot was available, and the ticket sale assured a straw house. The big top canvasman was frankly baffled but not conquered. He pondered for a time and then gave orders. His crews were instructed to move into position at specified intervals, encircling the area where the big top was to be erected, a quota of the heavy red wagons. With amazing speed and little confusion this work was done. The boss was no little amused by the bewilderment expressed by many of the circus folk. His own men solved the riddle quickly and were soon hard at work tying and guying the ropes to these wagons instead of to stakes. The tent went up as usual and no untoward results followed. To play the blacktop parking lot south of Soldiers Field in Chicago this circus had to use iron stakes instead of the wooden ones.

Among the more novel problems confronting the boss canvasman on a circus one year was the layout of a lot on the Canadian-United States border. The show was billed to play a small Canadian town, but the big top crew discovered that the stake line on one side would have to be driven in the soil of the United States. Quick work by the legal department made this possible. In our country circuses have not infrequently played cities where stake lines straddled state lines, and the parade route might do likewise.

The problems incurred in those cases, however, were those of the legal adjuster rather than those of the big top canvasman or the parade marshall. Occasionally they had to cooperate. If the legal adjuster reported to the big top man that the circus was to be victimized by the avarice of either town officials or the owners of adjacent property, the canvas boss would elect to change the entire layout. He would order every flag-stick set earlier by the layer out man removed and with much ingenuity would relocate these in such manner as to confine the tented city within the borders of the lot originally rented. Not a few owners of lots adjacent to a circus have thus had their dreams of quick and easy profits rudely shattered. For many years and since the early 1900s James "Jimmy"

Whalen was the Ringling Bros. and Ringling-Barnum boss canvasman. He came to the Ringling Bros. Circus as an assistant from the Walter L. Main Circus. There never was a better man for this job than Mr. Whalen.

During the long years of the early history of American Circuses the work of building their tented cities was accomplished by backbreaking toil. Stakes were driven by man power until the invention of the mechanical stake-driver. Canvas, often mud-laden and sodden, was loaded by straining men until a boss canvasman conceived a spool wagon to do this work. The Ringling-Barnum Circus came to use motorized cranes to load and unload canvas. In the last years of this show as a tented circus electric winches supplanted horses and elephants in raising the enormously heavy canvas of their big top. For a hundred years or more one of the most back-breaking and time-consuming tasks on a large circus was the erection of the several thousand seats and chairs. In recent years wagons with seats built as an integral part of them have greatly reduced the time required to erect grandstand and "blues" while at the same time afforded greater comfort and safety to circus patrons.

One of the most important responsibilities imposed upon the big top canvasman was always the decision as to whether or not the main tent should be emptied of patrons should a storm break during the performance. This man kept an eagle eye on the sky throughout the day, sensitive always to any change in barometric pressure, wind shifts, cloud formations or other portents of weather change. The safety of the patrons was always given first consideration. Then, too, big circus tents cost real money, and the destruction of one could result in an additional loss through lost performances. The major circuses in the golden years gave their big top boss canvasman handsome bonuses if by the end of the season the big top had been kept in the air through every performance and had not been destroyed by storms during erection or tear-down.

The train department was another important one. Before a railroad circus took to the road each season, the trainmaster was a busy man around winter-quarters. Depreciation always figured large in the budget of these circuses and that in the train department loomed big, indeed. Cars had to be largely rebuilt each year. Before his circus took to the road each spring the trainmaster had to memorize the length of every flat car, the length of every wagon to be loaded on these and the contents of each wagon. Once a circus was on the move there was no time for a trainmaster to check the records to ascertain such facts. As each wagon came to the loading runs at night he had to hurriedly identify it by its number to determine the order in which it was to be loaded. He had to keep wagons of varying sizes and design in such order as to utilize efficiently every available inch of space on the long line of flat cars.

Wagons had to be loaded in such order that those first needed on the lot were the first to come down the runs. Likewise the trainmaster had to make certain the wagons would be held securely in place on the flat cars while the train was in motion or being shunted about in the yards.

Diplomacy was a prime attribute of a train master. He had to arrange with his opposite member of the railway company for the handling and servicing of the show trains in each city the circus played. In many cities the trains on a big circus had to be cut into smaller sections to find storage room for them in the railroad yards until they could be reassembled at loading time. Switching crews had no love for circuses because they cluttered up the yards and caused a lot of extra work on show day. Unless the circus trainmaster was most diplomatic in dealing with these various people the circus might find its stock cars so spotted that they would be difficult to reach when the feed men were to service them with grain, hay and straw. Or the artists, musicians and executives might find their sleeping cars spotted beside a deep embankment or where it was necessary to wade through high grass and weeds to reach a street crossing. Yet other devices might be employed by a disgruntled crew to vent their displeasure on an arbitrary circus trainmaster.

The very lives of a circus's personnel and animals as well as the safety of its equipment depended greatly upon the work done by its trainmaster.

The relationship of a railway company to a circus was that of a private carrier not that of a common carrier. Railroads were under no obligation to transport circuses and at times they refused to do so. All contracts between railroads and circuses contained clauses that provided for this private carrier status. All of them contained clauses that released the railroads from all liabilities for claims and damages of every nature and name resulting from or occasioned by reason or on account of any accident or injury, from whatever cause. Circus, in turn, incorporated these release-of-damage clauses in the contracts signed with their personnel.

Despite these contracts several actions have been brought by circus people to recover damages resulting from alleged negligence on the part of the railroads. In some jurisdictions these release-of-damage clauses were ruled to be void under a state's constitution or a state's statute. In others they have been ruled void as against public policy. Some jurisdictions allowed recovery for willful negligence as contrasted with ordinary negligence.

Two interesting cases arose out of that horrible Hagenbeck-Wallace wreck in 1918 under these contracts. In *Diederick vs Davis*, 137 N. E.; 685; 80 Ind. 71 Appeal. the facts were that plaintiff was an employee of the Carl Hagenbeck and Great Wallace Show. The train made a stop near Ivanhoe Tower, near Gary, Indiana, because of a hot box. Flares were set out



and the block signals were set against an oncoming train. At 3:50 A.M. On June 22, 1918, the circus was going from Michigan City to Hammond, Indiana and was traveling on 49 cars in two sections. An all steel car empty troop train crashed into the rear end of the performer's section.

The court in denying a judgment in favor of the plaintiff said:

"The conclusion that the collision was due to willfulness of all or any of the men in charge of the troop train cannot be reached without doing violence to both reason and conscience. If the engineer was conscious of the fact that another train was on the track just ahead of his then we must presume that he was conscious of his own danger, and that the instinct of self preservation would have deterred him from driving his locomotive at a high rate of speed into such a formidable obstacle. We must presume that the engineer was a man of normal sensibilities and that, if he had been conscious of any impending danger, either to himself or to any one else, he would not have ruthlessly precipitated that danger."

In *Davis vs McRee*, 299 Fed. 142, the law and contract were the same but a different set of facts were presented to the court and the plaintiff recovered a judgment in the sum of \$100,000. In this case the court said:

"The evidence deduced at the second trial tends to show that the engineer for reasons good or bad, had not had sufficient sleep before undertaking the run, that he knew that another train was probably on the same track not far ahead, that he closed his cab window and was conscious of the stuffy condition of the cab before losing unconsciousness completely, that he gave no warning to the fireman or anyone else of his condition, that he fell asleep because of drowsiness and the want of air, and not, as at one time contended, because of any sudden indisposition. Under our former decision, to which we adhere, the issue of wanton or willful negligence was therefore properly submitted to the jury."

"There was of course no willful negligence in the sense of a deliberate intention to disregard all proper precautions and to let the train run on as it would without the engineer's control. But there was, or at least there was evidence justifying a finding that there was, an utterly reckless disregard of the duty imposed upon a railroad engineer, especially in the circumstances. His knowledge that he himself was in a more than ordinary fatigued condition, likely on slightest provocation to fall asleep, his further knowledge of the nearness of some, perhaps a passenger train, made his action in closing the window or in keeping it closed more than mere negligence; it might well be deemed to be such recklessness as to come within the designation of wanton negligence."

At the time these cases were brought into court the railroads were being operated by the U. S. Government because of the first

World War and the defendant was the director general of the railroads.

Some wag once commented that an army moves on its stomach. He might well have included circuses in his witticism, as every circus owner will grant. The fact automatically elevates the superintendent of a circus cook house to high rank among department heads. Without plenty of good wholesome food adequately prepared no circus could hope to keep a supply of workmen. Those who traveled with the Barnum & Bailey, the Ringling Bros., and the Ringling-Barnum shows invariably praised the excellence of the food. For many years A. L. "Ollie" Webb supervised the cookhouse on the Ringling and later the Ringling-Barnum Circuses.



**George J. Blood was named cookhouse superintendent of Ringling-Barnum following the death of A. L. "Ollie" Webb. Pfening Collection.**

One year when the Big One played Waterloo, Iowa, a George J. Blood went to the lot more intent on procuring a job than on seeing the performance. He had played football with the local high school and was at the time working in a bakery. Wanderlust had overtaken Blood, and he believed life with a circus might satisfy his yen for travel. Taking stock of his talents he had decided he could best earn his way as a member of the cookhouse crew. He sought out Ollie Webb, told him of his desire and of his experience as a baker and was hired. When Webb departed for the "last lot" George J. Blood became boss of Hotel Ringling-Barnum, responsible for supervising the feeding of between 1400 and 1600 people three times each day.

Blood was an observant and resourceful individual. He noted that the circus required much greater supplies of food when first it took to the road in the spring than it did later in the season. People who had done little or no work through the winter or had worked largely indoors found their appetites whetted by the first days of strenuous labor and by life out-of-doors. No doubt many of the roustabouts had

seldom satisfied their appetites during the off season for many of them were content to do a modicum of work. Mr. Blood always took great pride in his cookhouse. He saw to it that the best grades of meat and other staple foods were served with an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables in season. He was responsible for many innovations in his department. Among these may be listed excellent steam tables for keeping food warm during the necessarily long hours of serving, an electric oven which made possible an increased variety of breads and pastries and an electrically operated dish washer and sterilizer.

An elaborate system was evolved by circuses for loading of the cookhouse, its silverware, dishes, pots and kettles, its seats, tables and tents.

The cook house gang was the first on the lot each morning and usually before dawn, for they had to have the tent erected, the tables and seats in place, the tables set for breakfast prepared in time to feed crews of hungry workmen from all departments. Many of these had not partaken of food since the flag had gone down on the cookhouse at the end of the matinee the previous day.

The cookhouse wagons were the first to leave the lot in the afternoon, usually before the were doors for the evening performance. This equipment rode the first section of the show train, if there were more than one, and on the Ringling-Barnum Circus was invariably on its way no later than 10:30 at night. If the day had been a hot one there might be little slumber for the crew until their sleepers, which had stood in the sun in the railway yards through the day, cooled with the movement of the train as it headed for tomorrow's city.

Perhaps nowhere on the circus were there greater changes during the years than in its several mechanical departments. For years all the equipment was hauled to and from the lots each morning and night by several hundred draft horses. In those years the superintendent of baggage stock played an important role in a circus organization. It was essential that he knew horse flesh. He would travel about the country looking for good sound draft horses. These animals had to be strong to be able to pull the heavily loaded wagons along city streets (often not paved) and about the lot. A lot might be on sandy soil. Heavy wagons frequently cut deeply into these, necessitating hitching many extra horses to them. Rain sometimes converted a lot into a quagmire necessitating the use of from twenty to forty of these draft horses to extricate wagons axle-deep in mud. There were occasions when perhaps forty percherons with a mighty lurch would manage to drag the wheels of a mired wagon to firmer ground only to find themselves driverless, for the wagon box would remain sitting in the mud, its undercarriage literally torn from it. A large circus was no place for either second rate draft horses or second rate superintendents of baggage stock.



Another responsibility of the head of this department was the selection of drivers that could guide multi-horse hitches along crowded streets and about the railway yards during loading and unloading. It was no small feat to control from four to twenty teams of these magnificent horses through congested streets usually lined with thousands of towners. Not alone did the safety of valuable circus equipment depend upon the skill of these drivers but that of human lives as well. A number of these multi-team drivers became famous in the annals of the circus. The most noted of these was Jake Posey. At one time he drove forty beautifully matched horses pulling an enormous bandwagon over many of the principal streets in various cities of this country. During the five years that the Barnum Circus toured Europe just at the turn of this century hundreds of thousands of citizens of Great Britain and the Continent watched with frank amazement as Jake Posey held the reins of forty splendid horses in his huge hands and guided these spirited animals through crowded and often narrow streets and around sharp curves or corners.

Just as the lives and limbs of performers were in the hands of the trainmaster during the hours a circus was on the move, so were they entrusted to the care of the superintendent of properties during the brief minutes they dazzled audiences with their daring feats. Also to this man they entrusted their safety during practice hours. Surely thousands of circus-goers through the years must have been amazed as they studied the miles of rope and the multitude of trapeze bars and other paraphernalia that cluttered Madison Square Garden or the big top once either was rigged for a circus performance.

Once all the artists finally had been engaged for a season and it became the duty of the equestrian director to organize these into a well balanced and well presented program, he sought out the superintendent of properties. Rigging the building in which a large circus was to open its tour and later rigging the big top for the tented season involved a tremendous amount of detail. The equestrian director had to lay out the performance as to enable the property boss to rig the show that the ropes and rigging of one act would not interfere with those of other numbers. To keep continuity in a program, to keep building it to a climax, to rid a huge tent of several wild animal cages without interrupting the flow of the performance, to intermingle ground and aerial routines, to mask the withdrawal of one set of artists and the entrance of as many more by employing clown fooleries (much as a theater stage manager employs a curtain) presented unique and difficult problems for both equestrian director and superintendent of properties. Rigging Madison Square Garden for the giant Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus presented greater problems than did rigging the huge tent with which this circus toured the country for many years. Plans for both of these feats had to be worked out before



**Arnold A. "Mickey" Graves came to Ringling-Barnum from the Barnum & Bailey show, but started with Forepaugh-Sells in 1902. This photo of Graves was taken in 1928. Pfening Collection.**

the show left its winter-quarters, and many hours were devoted to the task.

The riggers themselves had to be men of unquestioned integrity capable of working at great heights. The vast majority of circus acts involve hazardous procedures. Unless rigging has been accurately and securely erected a performer's life may be snuffed out in the twinkling of an eye.

At times a circus had to play a lot that the superintendent of properties was unable to do much with because of the unevenness of the terrain. This led to the frustration of many an artist. A tight wire out of plumb meant that the star had to work with such caution as to rob his act of all spontaneity. It might compel him to eliminate somersaults to his disgust and the bewilderment of the audience. Such a lot might compel the leapers in a flying-and-return act to be off balance when they left their pedestals and might lead to their landing in the net below instead of in the hands of their catchers, wet or soggy ground would handicap both ground and aerial acts. A poor lot sometimes meant that performers were so restrained in their work that the entire show lacked its usual luster and brilliance.

Another responsibility of the superintendent of properties was to supervise the loading of the "prop" wagons to the end that every inch of space was utilized at maximum efficiency.

There came the day when the last proud Belgian yielded to truck and tractor, and the superintendent of baggage stock was supplanted by the boss of mechanized "horses." As cities grew circus lots were to

be found only farther and farther from the railway yards. This necessitated a speed-up in the hauling of equipment to the lot in the morning and back to the trains at night. This mechanization of the circus compelled a change in the wheels of the heavy wagons. Modern pavements would not tolerate the steel rimmed circus wagon wheel, so it was necessary to convert to rubber. This in turn, required the use of roller bearings to assure easier rotation of the wheels. With the disappearance of the steel-rimmed wheels went the rumble peculiar to circus wagons, —the rumble that had become actual "music" to the true circus fan. This rumble has been returned to all the parade wagons you can see on the streets for the mammoth July 4th circus parade on July 4th every year in Milwaukee and worth going miles to see.

The fully mechanized circus found it possible to set up on smaller lots, and this sometimes assured a lot closer to a city's center of population. Trucks and tractors require much less ground on which to maneuver than did multi-team hitches of horses. Truck and tractor can haul a greater load than can any reasonable horse hitch. It became no uncommon sight to see a truck hauling as many as six cage wagons to and from the lot. Truck and tractor possessed greater speed than did baggage horses and did not grow weary. With trucks and tractors there was no further danger of having runaway wagons on steep hills. This all helped to expedite the work of unloading or reloading the Big One that it was frequently clear of the lot shortly after midnight, a fact that circus men of an earlier day found it hard to believe for they had labored into the wee small hours of the morning. This earlier tear-down and faster setting-up enabled the Ringling-Barnum Circus to make longer railroad jumps and thus pass up smaller cities if that was otherwise desirable. In the days when the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey were different circuses the performances ended at ten in the evening and the aftershow concert a few minutes later. The Ringling-Barnum Circus never ended until about 10:45 at night and for many years The Ringling-Barnum Circus also had the concert or after show. Alack, alas the mechanization of the American circus also robbed it of its "extra-curricular" glamour! Today in any gathering of circus buffs that saw the old railroad and tented shows one will hear expressions of vain regrets for the loss of that world of proud Belgians and rumbling wagon wheels at dawn and dusk.

The most colorful and possibly the most capable superintendents of properties was Arnold A. "Mickey" Graves who came to the Ringling-Barnum Circus from the Barnum & Bailey Circus. During the set up and tear down you could hear "Mickey's" voice. And could he ever swear when the work was going on. Robert F. Reynolds was one of his assistants. Ralph Lill who was also an assistant of "Mickey" succeeded him. Walter Kaner, an assistant of Lill took over the department in 1943. Frank F. Mc-



Closkey, one of the present day owners of the Beatty-Cole Circus was in charge of the prop department for the 1947. He was Lillian Lietzel's rigger at the time she fell to her death in Copenhagen. Mike Petrillo was an assistant from that season on for many years. When Frank McCloskey became a manager in 1948 Robert "Bob" Reynolds took over the department.

It can really be said that the start of the downfall of the Ringling-Barnum Circus started in 1955 when the show dropped its add car and all out door advertising and small newspaper ads. Because of this the show got very little business until it reversed this policy when it went south. Then when Frank McCloskey and Walter Kernan the two managers of the show quit in St. Paul, "Bob" Reynolds did likewise and with him went the prop department. In 1956 the show came out with only Lloyd Morgan as manager, George Werner, the big top boss canvasman and James "Jimmy" Ringling. That year the show had an ample supply of workmen but no bosses to move the show with the result John Ringling North closed it in Pittsburgh. That ended the great Ringling Barnum Circus as a tented railroad circus.

The Barnum & Bailey, the Ringling Bros., Gollmar Bros. and Sparks Circuses that toured this country took great precautions to insure their patrons against the machinations of thieves, pickpockets and short change artists. One of the basic ideals of the founding brothers of the great Ringling show was that it was to be kept clean and honest. The Ringling Bros. required the best credentials from any one wanting a job as a ticket seller or handling money in any department.

For many years a very large number if not most of the circuses would steal the patrons blind. This was done in many ways. Shows carried shell and three card monte games. Ticket sellers paid for the right to sell circus tickets and they would short change people right and left. Even in the past twenty years we had one of the rottenest, most thieving, immoral circuses on the road. It was said of the American Corporation Shows that you could not steal from the show but you could from the public. In a letter from Jerry Mugivan from Peru, Indiana, dated January 21, 1929 to H. B. Gentry on the Sparks Circus there appears the following typewritten note on the border signed by the letters JM. This note is as follows: "PS I am enclosing a letter from Mr. . . . — a good candy cashier. Just robbed the safe one time — Sam Knows him."

The Ringling Bros. at times engaged their own detectives and at others depended on the services of one of the big detective agencies to protect their patrons. It was this unswerving dedication to integrity in every department that perpetuated the names of Ringling, Barnum and Bailey into our own times and established it as a general policy in the modern circus world.

All circuses touring our country today are free of grift and graft. Many present

day circuses are invited to repeat their territory by civic and city leaders.

Only one of the larger circuses carried a veterinarian. In the golden days of the circus there were some 400 baggage horses on the Ringling and Barnum circuses, a 100 or more ring horses, a huge menagerie filled with birds, reptiles, and mammals culled from the five continents and seven seas, and cages of wild animals for the veterinarian to keep sleek and fit. For some years Dr. J. Y. Henderson has kept an eagle eye on all animals carried by the Ringling-Barnum Circus. Even today Dr. Henderson is to be seen standing near the ring or rings where animals are performing, studying every movement intent on detecting any sign of sprain, torn tendon or incipient disease. He is a firm believer in the old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." When the Ringling-Barnum Circus was on the road as a big tented railroad circus Dr. Henderson had his own medical wagon stacked with drugs and medical equipment.



Dr. J. Y. Henderson

Of course the humans on a circus must not fare less well than do its animals. In its heyday the Ringling-Barnum Circus transported, fed and cared for from 1400 to 1600 people, — the equivalent of many an American village. The circus had the same need for the services of doctors and nurses as did the town or village. Some of the medical problems were peculiar to the circus because of its itinerant nature. It experienced a wide variety in climatic conditions as it moved from east to west, from north to south, from a seashore to prairies, from plains to mountain country in the United States and Canada. Its people were subjected to rapid changes in temperatures and humidities. The circus ran the gamut from rain to snow, from hot arid days to cold damp nights. Always there was the change in sources of food and drinking water from city to city.

The need for workmen to labor against time increased the risk of accidents and the incidence of delayed medical care. Treatment of slivers and bruises frequently had to be postponed until the show was either loaded or unloaded. Fractures and the more serious injuries perforce had to be intrusted to unknown doctors and strange hospitals.

Virtually every performer on a circus is and has always been engaged in a highly hazardous occupation. The driver of a truck engaged in hauling high explosives was heard to remark as he watched an aerialist perform, "You couldn't hire me to do that." So perilous is the work of the circus performer he finds insurance rates virtually prohibitive. He practices constantly to remain fit, to maintain the perfect coordination of mind and muscle that assures the greatest safety in his work. He tries to stay within the limits imposed upon him by the laws of physics. Despite all these precautions accidents do occur. Every year claims a toll of performers killed or permanently crippled.

All circus people coming into Wisconsin do not have to worry about not having medical or hospital insurance. No circus can enter Wisconsin unless it has compensation insurance that covers all employees of a circus. This insurance pays all medical and hospital bills and seventy-five per cent of a circus employees wages or salary. In order to obtain such insurance Wisconsin required all companies that write compensation insurance to belong to a pool to write such insurance. It was too big a risk for any one company to write such policies.

To provide its people with first aid and care in case of illness the Ringling-Barnum Circus in the years it traveled as a tented railroad show carried a physician and a nurse and furnished them with a well equipped first aid wagon. This medical staff treated the lesser injuries and the minor illnesses of everyone on the circus. More serious cases were committed to the care of local physicians and surgeons and were sometimes left in local hospitals until pronounced able to rejoin the circus. At one time this circus carried a specially equipped hospital railway car, named the Florence Nightingale. It was actually a miniature hospital on wheels but it proved impractical for several reasons and was discontinued.

The Ringling Bros. and the Barnum & Bailey and the Ringling Barnum Circuses were confronted with two major epidemics of sickness. In 1918 both the Ringling Bros., the Barnum & Bailey and all other circuses closed early because of the nation wide epidemic of Spanish Influenza. Mr. Braathen was playing in a band on the U. S. Kearsarge. After he returned to his ship in Boston Navy Yard from a furlough to his home in Mayville, North Dakota, he went down with possibly the first case of this disease on the Kearsarge. It spread rapidly to at least half of the people on the Kearsarge and many died including one from the band. In Boston they were dying



at the rate of two hundred a day for many days and virtually the entire city was shut down tight. There was nothing the circuses could have done to prevent such a major disaster.

In 1934 the Ringling Barnum Circus was inflicted with another major disaster but this one affected only the people on the Ringling show. It had taken on bad drinking water in a Pennsylvania stand and thereafter every day affected more and more of the show people. Many were left in hospitals in all stands and many died. When the show came to Madison our good friend and Circus Fan Dr. Thomas W. Tormey prevailed upon Dr. Carl A. Harper, the head of the Wisconsin Department of Health to make an investigation which he did. He was satisfied that the typhoid fever was the result of bad drinking water. He had the water tank and everything used for drinking purposes sterilized. Fortunate it was that Madison was given a Sunday lay-over that year. Dr. Harper appointed one of the state medical officers to travel with the circus to protect it from any local interference. He let the circus sell all bottled and packed goods which was not true in many states. As we recall fifteen people were left in a hospital here and one died and we had him sent to his home in New Jersey and kept the story from the newspapers. It was not long after the circus left Madison that the circus was free of this horrible epidemic. It was a terrible year to visit around the circus because every one was just scared to death that they would be next. Helen and Henrietta Wallenda were both seriously ill in the Harper Hospital in Detroit, Michigan.

Circuses have always provided their own lighting. The earliest ones depended on candles and were elated when kerosene lamps became available. Various types of gasoline and gas lights have been used. In 1933 at the 50th and golden anniversary date of the Ringling Bros. Circus in Baraboo, Wisconsin, all the tents were lighted by electricity for the first time. Once electric generators became available all circuses have made use of them to light their tents and the lot. Strangely enough no circus, not even the goliaths that traversed this country ever carried an extra generator. They are costly to own and operate, so it was up to the electrician in charge of them to keep them in running condition. Those circuses that carried more than one generator did have a margin of protection against a breakdown for if one plant failed a hook-up would immediately be made to another (the sideshow dynamo be called upon to service the big top, for instance). In the days of the big tented railway shows the superintendent of lights had to lay out what seemed to be miles of heavy electric cables on or in the ground (as circumstances demanded) to the various tents and wherever current was needed. At night these cables were rolled onto large wooden drums or spools for transportation, and the big electric lamps were packed in their own prop boxes to protect against breakage. A

generator was also carried in one of the passenger cars to light the entire train.

Public address systems were unknown in the early circus days. These are phenomenon of the electric age. During the latter years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century the big tops of the major circuses were truly BIG, particularly if compared with those of the present day. The owners were determined that everyone under those enormous spreads of canvas, whether he were seated in the "blues" at the ends or in the reserved seat section through the middle of the tent, should be afforded the opportunity to hear every word spoken by the big show announcer. In most cases these announcers were "graduates" of the sideshow. There they had developed powerful voices in ballyhooing from its platform the sideshow attractions. The two greatest of the big show announcers were Lew Graham and Clyde Ingalls. Graham had been with the Ringling show since the early 1900s and we have many of his letters in our circus collection.

The new century brought a new sideshow manager to the Ringling Bros. Circus, none other than Lew Graham. Following the close of the 1902 season he went to Europe with the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show as manager of privileges. The Ringlings soon realized they had made a serious mistake in allowing Mr. Graham to leave their organization. In the summer of 1903 Otto Ringling wrote Mr. Graham, and the exchange of letters and cablegrams that followed disclose that all of the latter's de-



**Lew Graham was known as the greatest announcer in the circus world. His voice could be heard distinctly in any part of the big top. This photo of Graham was taken on Ringling in 1913. Pfening Collection.**



**Clyde Ingalls was the "voice" of the Barnum & Bailey Circus, and succeeded Graham on the combined shows. Both Graham and Ingalls were also side show managers. Ingalls is shown here on the Ringling-Barnum show around 1930. Pfening Collection.**

mands as to salary, living conditions and full authority over the sideshow were met. This indicates he had quickly become a key man with the Ringling organization. He continued with it until the merger of the Ringling and the Barnum & Bailey circuses. Lew became the big show announcer for the Greatest Show on Earth. His deep resonant voice, magnified only by his cupped hands, carried to the farthest reaches of that huge tent as he told of the wonders of this or that act which the audience was about to witness.

Clyde Ingalls was the "voice" of the Barnum & Bailey Circus for many years and eventually succeeded Lew Graham on the combined shows when the latter was stricken with a fatal illness. Clyde's clarion voice was heard almost as well by those watching the performance from the end seats as by those in the more centrally located reserved seat chairs. Those who were fortunate enough to be circus-goers in the days when these men made their voices ring throughout those huge big tops without the aid of any mechanical device must sometimes ponder the question "Would Lew Graham or Clyde Ingalls have deigned to use a microphone when they disdained the use of a megaphone?"

There were able superintendents of a multitude of other departments, such as seats, wardrobe, ushers, ticket sellers, menagerie, etc., all working so effectively as to weld the circus into a unified whole, into an amusement institution whose patrons seldom were conscious of the gigantic organization that functioned behind the wondrous spectacle presented in the rings, on the stages, and on the hippodrome track and in the air.

The commander-in-chief that held these



numerous and widely varied departments together, making it so unified a whole as to intrigue military men in many nations, was known as the general manager. He delegated much important work to assistant managers. One of these put the show on the lot in the morning and another took it off at night. All general managers reached this position by climbing the ladder whose rungs were the various departments of the circus. One of the most beloved and most able was Carl Hathaway who had been a clarinet player in a circus band. Another, George W. Smith, had been at one time a waiter in the cookhouse. Arthur Concello, was an outstanding aerialist in the Concello flying-and-return act, featured on the Ringling-Barnum show for a number of years. The Ringling-Barnum Circus went down for good as a big tented railroad circus in the middle of the 1956 season because the show did not have the department heads that could move it, get it up or down.

The most colorful equestrian director ever seen on an American circus was Fred Bradna, born Frederick Ferber in Strasbourg in 1871, and the scion of a wealthy Alsatian brewer and banker. Given the traditional education befitting his family's station, Frederick Ferber learned to speak several languages which were to stand him in good stead in a world quite foreign to his father's dreams for him. Sports appealed to him and he became proficient in several, including parallel bars and pole vaulting. He became an accomplished horseman and when his time came to serve in the German Army he elected the Cavalry.

While in military service young Ferber attended a performance of the Nouveau Cirque in Paris, one of the Continent's leading circuses at the turn of this century. Officer Ferber chanced to go the evening a new star was to make her debut to Parisian audiences. She was petite, blonde Ella Bradna.

Marilyn Wirth, the "Greatest Rider in the British Colonies," had once fallen into the box of the Right Honorable Cecil Rhodes because her horse shied when unexpectedly his mistress had been asked to "jump banners," a trick to which she was unaccustomed. Ella Bradna performed the same feat for much the same reason, — her horse shied when the night of her Paris debut an admirer tossed a bouquet into her ring. That tossed Ella Bradna into the arms of the Alsatian cavalry officer, Frederick Ferber. Later they were to say they had been literally thrown together. It was the beginning of a romance destined to endure half a century.

Papa Ferber disapproved of his son courting a girl from the circus world. When young Frederick married his Spangleland sweetheart, wealthy, proud Mr. Ferber disowned his son. Thereupon the equally proud son renounced the family name and adopted that of his bride, and together they carved a large niche for the name of Bradna in the world of sawdust and spangles.

In the spring of 1903 Ella and Fred came to America to ride as featured artists with



**Frederick Ferber married Ella Bradna and took her name and as Fred Bradna became equestrian director of the Barnum & Bailey and the combined shows. This photo was taken in the 1940s. Pfening Collection.**

the great Barnum & Bailey Circus, which that year returned from a successful five year tour of Europe. Because each spoke several languages Mr. and Mrs. Bradna became unofficial translators for most of the several nationalities that comprised the roster of performers. This led to the assignment of various managerial duties to Mr. Bradna, and almost without either him or the executive staff realizing it he had glided into a position of responsibility beyond those that were his as a performer. He continued to assist Ella in her center ring riding and he himself rode menage. In 1911 the Ringlings, who in 1907 had purchased the Barnum & Bailey Show, appointed Fred Bradna assistant equestrian director, under William E. Gorman. Four years later, with the departure of Mr. Gorman, Mr. Bradna assumed the full duties of equestrian director and remained in this capacity when the Ringlings merged their two big shows in the spring of 1919.

Fred Bradna was impeccable in both attire and decorum. He wore the traditional clothes of the equestrian director, usually a red coat and dark riding breeches for matinees and full dress with high silk hat for evening performances. He wore these with such éclat that millions of circus-goers came to consider this attire as "Bradna-ish."

Mr. Bradna possessed a sixth sense in putting together the multiplicity of varied acts which each year the talent scout assembled from lands beyond the seas. He held a tight rein on the artists, demanding promptness, neatness, courtesy, excellence

of performance, and loyalty to the show. He always commanded their respect. He never hesitated to assess a fine for any infraction of the show's rules.

American circus-goers thought of Ringmaster Bradna as "Mr. Frenchman." Polished of manner, volatile, fun-loving, a linguist, he was much in demand as a guest. Various performers have said they never recall seeing Fred or Ella Bradna eat in the circus cookhouse. They breakfasted late in their stateroom on the train and invariably accepted an invitation to dine between shows with the mayor, the governor or some other leading citizen or circus fan. One thing is certain, if they saw a fly in an eating place they would not eat at that restaurant. It would be impossible to approximate an accurate estimate of the number of people who attended The Greatest Show on Earth in the hopes of seeing, greeting, and perhaps dining with the Bradnas, but certain it is they stimulated the sale of tickets.

On September 12, 1945 in Dallas, Texas a sudden storm broke, and Fred Bradna joined others in assisting frightened patrons to leave the tent. Without any warning a quarter pole broke loose from its moorings and caught Mr. Bradna with so vicious an impact as to fracture one of his legs in several places. There followed many months of pain. Excellent medical and surgical care enabled him to walk again, but he never returned to the circus. After forty-two years of trouping with first the Barnum and then the Ringling-Barnum shows he and Ella decided to remain in their Sarasota home where they could better follow the dictates of their desires. Fred indulged his passion for fishing. Ella found delight in preparing the foods of their native lands for which they had long hungered.

Death claimed Mr. Bradna on February 21, 1955 at the age of eighty-three, and Ella joined him on the "last lot" on November 12, 1957 at the age of eighty-four. With their passing two more of the dedicated, talented, loyal individuals who made The Greatest Show on Earth click had made their last journey, and none there are to replace them.

It requires something more than a bagful of tricks to become a circus artist. Nor is it enough to perform a varied routine with supreme skill. To become a great artist the skilled circus performer must possess or develop showmanship. He must be able to "sell" his act. So also must a circus have something more than a bagful of expert performers if it is to attain to greatness. Fifty or two-hundred-and-fifty superlative artists if not properly cast may result in a hodgepodge exhibition or, at best a thrill show.

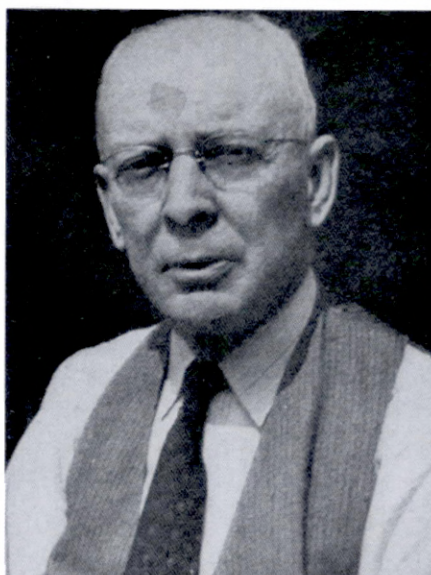
Recognition of this truism was one of the factors that made the five Ringling brothers great showmen. And their recognition of this basic truth was never better exemplified than in their elevation to high positions of responsibility two of their performers, Fred Bradna and Pat Valdo.



# KEY MEN OF THE BIG SHOW 1943 SEASON



**ED F. KELLY**  
Assistant to the General Manager



**FRED C. DeWOLFE**  
Treasurer with Show



**LEONARD AYLESWORTH**  
Superintendent of Canvas



**AL BUTLER**  
Contracting Agent



**ARTHUR HOPPER**  
General Agent, Outdoor Advertising



**HERBERT DU VAL**  
Legal Adjuster

Mr. Valdo was born in Binghamton, New York, the son of a cigar manufacturer, and christened Patrick Fitzgerald. Papa Fitzgerald, like Papa Ferber, dreamed of his son following in his footsteps and in this was doomed to a like disappointment. Young Patrick early developed a desire to juggle things, — anything he could get his hands on without incurring too stern a form of parental disapproval. A family of circus jugglers recognized his aptitude and encour-

aged him to continue his practicing. About the time Fred and Ella Bradna made their bow to an American audience, Patrick Fitzgerald joined out with the John Robinson Circus, not as a juggler but as a clown.

Exhibiting the extrasensory powers that were to lead him to the heights in the show world, young Fitzgerald early sensed that his family cognomen was ill adapted to circus programs, — born a generation later he might have recognized its political po-

tential. He changed it to the more glamorous one, "Valdo" which proved to be a natural and has certainly not hindered his ascent in Spangleland.

Pat used his juggling skill from time to time and added wire walking to his repertoire. This not only ensured him better circus engagements but enabled him to procure vaudeville appearances in the off seasons. But clowning proved to be his *forte* perhaps because it teased his Irish imagina-



# KEY MEN OF THE BIG SHOW



**DAVID BLANCHFIELD**  
Superintendent of Trucks

tion. Until his last years it always delighted Pat to think up new and unique clown gags. He early perfected a whiteface make-up that appealed not alone to the ducat holders but to the artist that designed the circus posters. The lithographs on which this clown head appeared won so much nation wide attention that in 1954 the Ringling-Barnum Circus re-issued them by the thousands. This intrigued the younger artists then on the show for they had never seen their "father confessor" in clown make-up.

In 1909 the name of Pat Valdo appeared in the program of the great Barnum & Bailey Circus, then Ringling-owned, as one of their bevy of talented clowns. Unlike Fred Bradna, Pat Valdo was no linguist, but what Irishman ever needed to command any language other than his own to make himself understood by his fellows? Surely not Pat. Like Mr. Bradna, Mr. Valdo made himself generally useful about the show. He, too, advanced up the ladder of responsibility with so little fanfare that his load increased almost imperceptibly. In 1923, however, the Ringlings made him the official assistant equestrian director.

This gave Pat greater latitude for the use of his extrasensory powers. He and Bradna worked together each season to weld into a beautiful glamorous performance the several hundred artists which had been assembled from many lands. More and more this responsibility devolved upon Mr. Valdo. To decide which performer was to appear in which ring and at what spot in the two-and-a-half hour program required great ingenuity. In deciding where and when each act was to appear Pat had always to remember the problems confronting the boss property man and his riggers. Too, he had always to visualize the performance as a whole, — the impression it would leave on critics and circus-goers. It must be properly



**RAY MILTON**  
Train Master

balanced and built to a splendid climax. And always, always there were the desires and temperaments of an aggregation of talented and ambitious artists to be given consideration. No easy task this, but Pat's gifts and Irish temperament had proven fully equal to it for nearly four decades. Nothing, absolutely nothing escaped his eyes in the many rehearsals that were necessary to welding the parts into the whole. A rope



**PAT VALDO**



**JOHN SABO**  
Superintendent of Menagerie Animals

left dangling jangled his nerves; a pedestal left unnecessarily in the ring brought a quick request for its removal; a clashing of colors in wardrobe or in the arrangement of spec floats had to be promptly remedied. Any failure on the part of an artist to give of his best met with an Irish witticism that was not soon forgotten.

Mr. Valdo's extrasensory powers were displayed in another fashion. Year after year foreign acts were brought to this country by the talent scouts of the Greatest Show on Earth. Unfailingly these possessed high degrees of skills in the various routines that together comprised a circus repertoire, but too often these artists lacked a knowledge of presentation and showmanship. Circus patrons who had been privileged to watch a troupe of these artists over some period of time were amazed to see how under the knowing tutelage of Mr. Valdo this deficiency had been completely corrected.

In 1929 Mr. Valdo was made director of personnel, a position for which he was preeminently qualified, both because of his Irish heritage and his life time of experience in the show world. His had been the task of maintaining peace and harmony in a miniature league of nations, with the misunderstandings that arose from barriers of language, the conflicting professional ambitions and the volatile temperaments that were so often the hallmark of the artist in any field of endeavor. This involved serving as an unofficial "father confessor" to the perplexed and bewildered, the disappointed and frustrated, and the troubled and worried man and woman striving to maintain a position in the once highly competitive world of the circus artists. Pat met this responsibility with a tact and diplomacy that endeared him to literally thousands of



performers that worked under his direction through the years.

When Mr. John Ringling relinquished the position of international talent scout, Mr. Valdo was given these responsibilities in addition to the many that were already his. The close of the tented season each autumn thereafter found Pat on his way across the Atlantic to visit circuses large and small in many countries, studying each act with a trained eye as he searched for the bareback rider or wire artist, the trapeze performer or acrobat, the juggler or perch troupe to fill not only for the Greatest Show on Earth but those needed by other circuses John Ringling had purchased of the American Circus Corporation. Mr. Ringling had set high standards in this field, and Mr. Valdo lowered no banners. He chose with an unerring eye the finest performers the world possessed with the result that American audiences were long privileged to see the stars of circusdom as they performed in the United States and Canada.

In his last years Mr. Valdo made the annual trek to New York City there to guide his beloved Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus through that most critical of its engagements. Then he returned to his home in Sarasota, Florida. There he found genuine happiness in planning the performance for the ensuing season. His first love remained just that, — conceiving new wardrobe, new gags, new props for the world's foremost clowns, — men who were growing old but still in there pitching to provoke laughter from the "children of all ages" that daily sat



**Arthur M. Concello, became one of the great circus managers of all time and perhaps the only performer to really succeed in management. He is shown here with Antoninette on Ringling-Barnum in 1942. Pfening Collection.**

entranced by the antics of the joeys. He kept in contact with the circus on its road tour via telephone, and his advice was highly valued by those who carried on the intricate work from day to day.

Standing by Pat through the years was

his quiet but gifted wife, Laura of the famous Meers family, who for four generations carved careers for themselves along the tanbark trails of Europe and America. The fact that she was herself a talented performer enabled Laura Meers Valdo to be truly a helpmate unto her famous husband. Laura Valdo died in Sarasota, Florida, October 19, 1961, at the age of 77. Pat died in Sarasota, on November 7, 1970, at the age of 89.

The five brothers from Baraboo, Wisconsin, were never unmindful of the services rendered their organization by the men who made it click. In building the largest and finest circus the world has ever known these sons of a German harness maker themselves performed tasks from the most menial to the most high. This enabled them better to appreciate the efforts made by the members of their staff each day in solving the multitude of problems with which they were confronted. The respect of the Ringling boys for their department heads was evinced in various ways throughout the season, and come Christmas there were checks for each of these bosses and executives ranging in amounts from \$200 to \$1000.

Al Ringling, the eldest of the brothers, had been the cornerstone in the building of the mammoth institution. When he died in 1911 his will revealed bequests of from \$3000 to \$10,000 to various of the department heads on the circus. No one knew better than Al Ringling that it was these men who made it click.

#### **BACK ISSUES OF BANDWAGON MAGAZINE**

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#### **HISTORIC ELEPHANT PHOTO**



This most unusual photo of three elephants doing a one leg stand was taken on September 19, 1970, during the San Angelo (Texas) Shrine Circus.

Mac MacDonald is credited with originating the act with Opel on Polack Bros. Circus. Opel is shown in the center of the photo with Peggy MacDonald. MacDonald also trained Ina for Tommy Hanneford. Ina, with Tommy Hanneford, is shown on the left. Louie, another Polack elephant was broken by MacDonald to do a one leg stand and is on the right with MacDonald.

The photo was supplied by Ralph Hartman and was taken by his sister, Mrs. A. H. Mooradian.



# Report On 1972 Rail Moves

Text & Photos by Bill Rhodes

The 1972 season saw several new ideas being tried out by railroad transported shows. Ringling Bros.-Barnum & Bailey Red Unit used a double deck flat car which permitted double loading space at no increase in railroad cost (see photo 1). The lower deck carries cages of cat animals. The cats are enclosed by the sides and upper deck and have some protection from the weather. The upper deck is loaded with passenger automobiles used by show personnel. Multiple deck railroad cars have been used for new car delivery for years but this, as far as we know, is the only use by a show. The cages are unloaded first by a tractor (see photo 2). The large number which can be carried are shown in photo 3. Then light weight runs are set which allow automobiles to be driven onto the deck of the empty flat car ahead (photo 4). The double deck car must be the last car in the cut to be unloaded and the first to be loaded.

The James E. Strates Shows used a novel system to eliminate the need for polers. A semi-truck is loaded ahead of each string of wagons and serves both to guide and tow the wagons on the train (photo 5). Four to six wagons are loaded behind each truck. The assistance of one or two big Case tractors with hook ropes is needed to get up the runs and handle the long strings of wagons on the flats. The wagons are towed from the lot one or two at a time and connected into longer groups at the runs. The system is a labor saver but has a disadvantage if the crossing is narrow where lining up so many wagons in a short turning space can be a problem (photo 6).

Lawrence Carr Shows appeared at the Kentucky State Fair for the first time in 1972

The wide crossing allowed a dozen cages to be unloaded at once. This was not the entire carload.



A Ringling train arrives for the first time in Frankfort Ky. Appearance was in the newly completed Sports Arena.

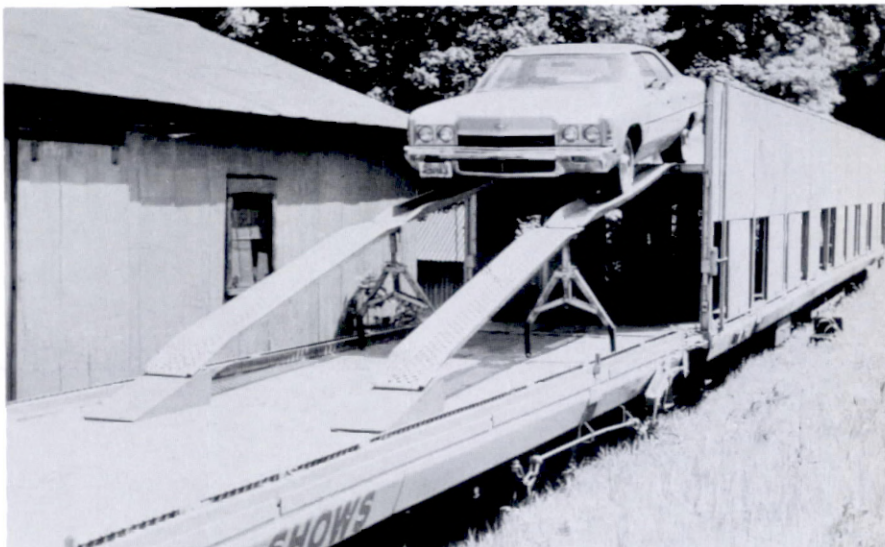
A Clark CTA 630 tractor tows cages out of the lower deck of the new flat. Two rows of cages are carried.





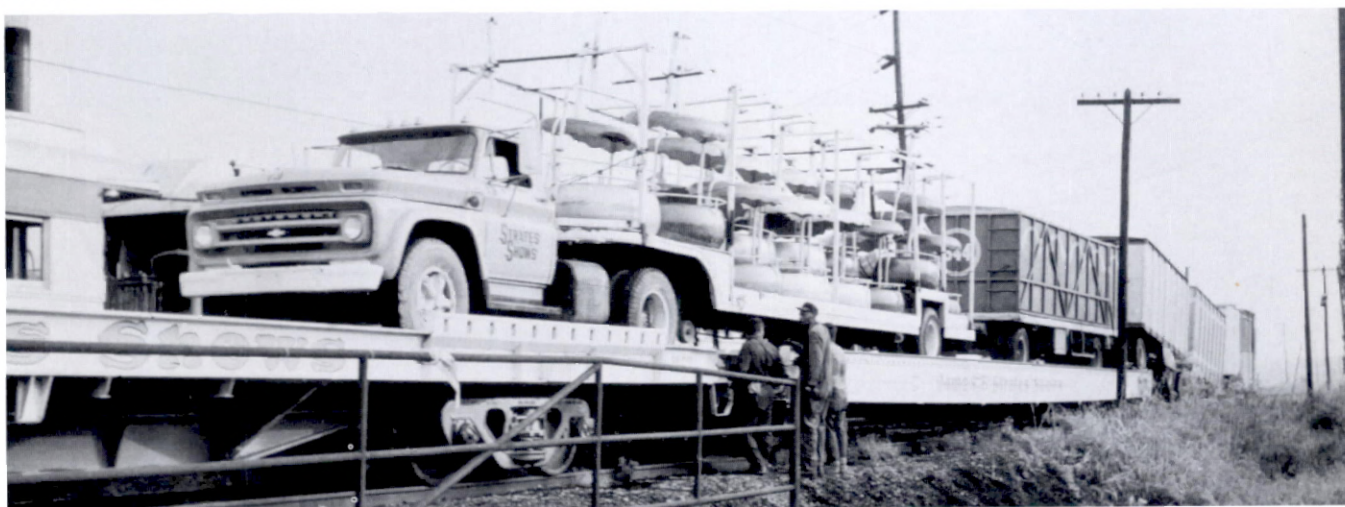
and faced a long run from the previous date in Bangor, Maine. The show normally moves over the highway but decided to try commercial Piggyback service. Most of the show's semi trucks were left in New England. Some ride units arrived over the road by hired tractors which returned to Maine empty. The train consisted of 13 system flats carrying 26 rides and trailers. A local drayman was employed to unload the trailers from the flats using a special truck capable of lifting the trailers off the fifth wheel supports (photo 7). The show's own trucks then moved the ride units to the lot.

The operation went off quite smoothly and on departure from Louisville the size of the train was increased to 18 system flats so that the show's trucks and other trailers could also be carried (photo 8). This operation is reportedly to be repeated in 1973 and may point the way to similar long distance moves by circuses and other carnivals. However as accomplished it is dependent on the availability of piggyback runs and special dray trucks at the towns where the show is playing. Skilled drivers are also essential since loading requires the trailers to be backed the length of the train.



A Strates Shows semi tows a long string of wagons up the runs. A big diesel tractor helping out is on the opposite side of the train, not visible in this photo. Loading at Nashville Tenn.

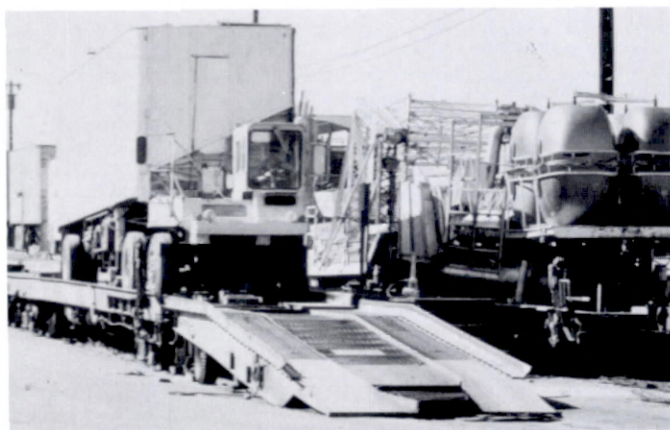
A Ringling staff car is driven down the lightweight runs onto the next flat.



Two cuts of system flats carrying rides of the Lawrence Carr Shows are unloaded in Louisville. Flats have two fifth wheel

supports so can carry only two trailers regardless of length.

Dual wheels of the second and third wagons have one wheel off the runs. Note that the runs carry Olson Shows name.







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